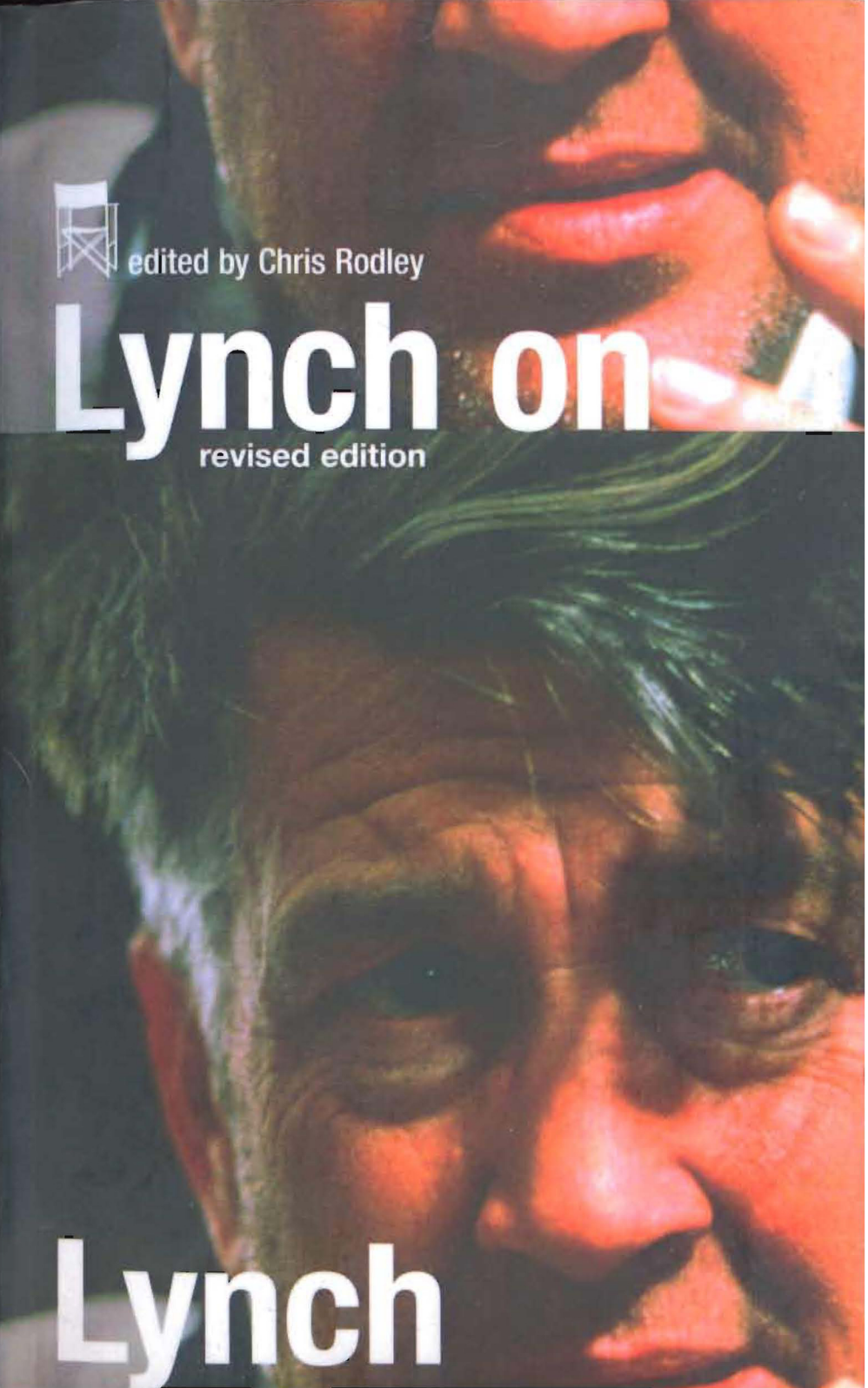

edited by Chris Rodley

Lynch on Lynch

revised edition

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FSG

Now fully updated, **Lynch on Lynch** describes the career of a cinematic genius who has continued to astonish film-goers with the lovely and life-affirming *The Straight Story* and the luxurious dread of the Academy Award®-nominated *Mulholland Drive*.

David Lynch erupted onto the cinema landscape with *Eraserhead*, establishing himself as one of the most original, imaginative, and truly personal directors at work in contemporary film. Over the course of a career that includes such films as *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet*, *Wild at Heart*, *Lost Highway* and the seminal TV series *Twin Peaks*, Lynch has remained true to an artistic vision of innocence lost or adrift in the direst states of darkness and confusion. In this definitive career-length interview book, Lynch speaks openly about the stunning range of his creative work.

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Lynch on Lynch

REVISED EDITION

Edited by Chris Rodley

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This book is dedicated to Gaye Pope, who sadly passed away in 2003. Gaye did many things at Asymmetrical and has a number of varied screen credits, including 'Executive Assistant to David Lynch', but to me she was a saviour. Without her, the first edition of this book could easily have outstripped *Eraserhead*'s own five-year production period. Her continued assistance with all manner of organization and detail at every stage of the process – not to mention providing a steady flow of *damn* fine cups of coffee and turkey sandwiches during the interview sessions – were so invaluable it's *not funny*. Not to mention her ever ready, welcoming smile.

Introduction to the Revised Edition

> The sensation of 'uncanniness' was an especially difficult feeling to define. Neither absolute terror nor mild anxiety, the uncanny seemed easier to describe in terms of what it was not, than in any essential sense of its own.
>
> Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*

In recounting the early difficulties in finding a precise definition for 'uncanniness' – the sense of 'unease' first identified in the late eighteenth century – Vidler could be describing the problems sometimes encountered by critics and audiences when faced with the cinema of David Lynch. If it is not only hard to define the experience of watching a Lynch film, but also to pinpoint exactly *what* one has actually seen (most recently evident in the delirious responses to his last film *Mulholland Drive*), it is because the uncanny lies at the very core of Lynch's work.

No other contemporary director works with all the available elements of cinema to the same degree as Lynch does. This is precisely because Lynch has to mobilize every aspect of the film-making process in order to express the elusive quality of the uncanny. His sensitivity to the textures of sound and image, to the rhythms of speech and movement, to space, colour and the intrinsic power of music, mark him as unique in this respect. He is a director working at the very epicentre of the medium. However, the originality and inventiveness of Lynch's work comes, first and foremost, from an ability to access his own inner life. It is as a consequence of the truthfulness with which he brings that inner life to the screen that Lynch has revitalized the medium.

Although his background in painting and avant-garde film-making might explain the striking formal qualities of Lynch's cinema, it fails to account for the sheer power of his vision. For Lynch, such power occurs only when all the elements of cinema are not only present and but also 'correct', producing what he often refers to as a 'mood'; when everything seen and heard contributes to a certain 'feeling'. The feelings that excite him most are those that approximate the sensations and emotional traces of dreams: the crucial element of the nightmare that is impossible to communicate simply by describing events. Conventional film narrative, with its demands for logic and legibility, is therefore of little use to Lynch, as is the limitation of

working within any one genre at a time. In Lynch's universe, worlds – both real and imagined – collide. The sense of unease in his movies is partly a product of this cross-generic approach, perceived by the audience as the absence of any rules or conventions that might provide comfort and – crucially – orientation.

The mood or feeling that Lynch's films convey is strongly linked to a form of intellectual uncertainty – what he calls being 'lost in darkness and confusion'. It is here that the uncanny clearly expresses itself in Lynch's films. It doesn't reside in everything that is strange, weird or grotesque, but is the opposite of those things, which – by virtue of their exaggeration – refuse to provoke fear. The uncanny's attributes, in what Freud termed 'the field of what is frightening', are those of dread rather than actual terror, of the haunting rather than the apparition. It transforms the 'homely' into the 'unhomely', producing a disturbing unfamiliarity in the evidently familiar. In Freud's words: 'The uncanny is uncanny because it is secretly all too familiar, which is why it is "repressed".' This is the essence of Lynch's cinema.

As Vidler has pointed out, the uncanny was rooted in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe and E.T.A. Hoffmann. Its early aesthetic manifestation was in the depiction of apparently benign and homely interiors disrupted by the fearful invasion of an alien presence. This is the very stuff of *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks*, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*. Its psychological expression was in the metaphor of the double, where the threat is perceived as a replica of the self, all the more terrifying because its otherness is apparently the same. In Lynch's work, this finds its correlation in the director's abstract spin on the Jekyll and Hyde syndrome: Jeffrey/Frank in *Blue Velvet*; Leyland Palmer/Killer Bob in *Twin Peaks*, Fred Madison/Pete Dayton in *Lost Highway* and – most ambitiously – Betty Elms/Diane Selwyn and Rita/Camilla Rhodes in *Mulholland Drive*.

The uncanny was also born out of the rise of the great cities. As people began to feel cut off from nature and the past, it became a modern anxiety associated with illness and psychological disturbances – particularly spatial fears (agoraphobia and claustrophobia). Lynch's own early urban panic, and his affection for nature and the idyllic dream past, may have contributed to the spatial fear so evident in his own cinema – often expressed in the use of the CinemaScope frame. Characters such as Fred Madison in *Lost Highway* are surrounded by empty space – stranded in the uncertain geography of their own lives. Or, as with Henry in *Eraserhead*, any environment – inside or outside – has to be minutely and carefully negotiated. Insecurity, estrangement and lack of orientation and balance

are sometimes so acute in Lynchland that the question becomes one of whether it is possible to ever feel 'at home'. Both Fred Madison and Diane Selwyn are forced to adopt extreme measures to achieve the illusion of stability and happiness, creating more innocent parallel identities and worlds for themselves – dream scenarios in which events struggle to overcome the reality of mental collapse.

The uncanny was renewed as an aesthetic category by the Modernist avant-gardes, who used it as an instrument of 'defamiliarization'. For the Surrealists, it came to reside in the state between dream and awakening, hence their interest in the cinema. If Lynch is, as film critic Pauline Kael once claimed, 'the first populist Surrealist – a Frank Capra of Dream logic', it is precisely because of his interest in this defamiliarization process, and in the waking/dreaming state. *Mulholland Drive* is entirely built upon Diane Selwyn's confusion about what is really happening, what may have happened, what could have happened, and what may yet occur. 'Hey pretty girl, time to wake up,' says the mysterious Cowboy, but when – precisely – did she fall asleep? Not since Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), in which Peter Carter is diagnosed as 'suffering from a series of highly organized hallucinations comparable to an experience of actual life' has the dreamlike quality of cinema been so ingeniously celebrated. Now that the major American studios have abdicated from so many areas of movie-making, leaving the 'independents' to merely occupy the vacant lot, it seems that David Lynch virtually owns the sole American franchise on movie 'dreamtime'.

Lynch has always been the dreamer who finds intellectual analysis of the dream at best woefully reductive or worse – destructive. Critics and audiences are often frustrated by his reluctance to engage in precise textual analysis of his films. New technologies, and the flow of information on which they depend, exacerbate this situation. Nowadays a director's commentary on a movie's DVD release is standard issue. For Lynch, this is the very definition of a nightmare situation. He prefers to show, rather than explain, to feel rather than prescribe. His approach to the creation of cinema is, as one might therefore expect, not only highly intuitive, but also open to the operations of luck, fate and accident. His film-making is almost an act of faith – a fragile balancing of mysterious forces. He characterizes himself as a 'radio' attempting to tune in to ideas and images, and his divining process has produced some startling results.

For *Blue Velvet*, this meditative approach excavated a classic Freudian tale, despite Lynch's assertion that he knows nothing of psychoanalytic theory – a claim that those close to him will confirm. The fact that

Dorothy Vallens could be suffering from Stockholm Syndrome, or that Fred Madison in *Lost Highway* might be experiencing a psychogenic fugue – both identified mental conditions – seems to have been news to Lynch. Not only is he apparently unaware of textbook explanations of the 'troubles' that interest him, he resets restrictions subsequently placed on them by definitions, theories and orthodoxies.

His extraordinary success in 'plugging into' various emotional states without any apparent need or desire for conventional research has, on occasion, dispensed with the valued refuge of American cinema: subtext. *Blue Velvet*, for instance, is a film that is not afraid to show its true colours. This, in part, accounts for the film's ability both to shock and to impress. *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* are less obvious in their operations because Lynch now requires more experimental narrative forms and abstract ideas with which to express the increasingly interior worlds his characters are forced to inhabit in response to their own disappointments, fears and extreme actions.

It's worth noting that, after the release of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, Lynch received many letters from young girls who had been abused by their fathers. They were puzzled as to how he could have known exactly what it was like. Despite the fact that the perpetration of both incest and filicide was represented in the 'abstract' form of Killer Bob, it was recognized as faithful to the subjective experience. Lynch not only draws from his own inner life, he has the uncanny ability to empathize with the experiences of others, whether they be male or female, young or old. He makes them his own. There is, therefore, little contradiction between Lynch's professed happy, 'normal' childhood and the often tormented, extraordinary lives of his characters. Lynch's resistance to those readings of his movies that beg autobiographical connections finds its basis here, as well as in the reductive banality of such an approach – which, in attempting to understand *Eraserhead*, for instance, finds it more convenient to see the workings of autobiography than of imagination and empathy.

Finally, we are left with the apparent contradiction of the 'regular guy' who makes 'deviant' cinema: the humorous, charming, 'folksy' director from Missoula, Montana, who keeps looking under the rock to expose darkness and decay. It was *The Elephant Man*'s executive producer Stuart Cornfeld (and not Mel Brooks, to whom it was attributed) who so adroitly represented this paradox with the phrase 'Jimmy Stewart from Mars'. This works both as a humorous binary description and as deceptively simple shorthand for a more complex picture. Jimmy Stewart's persona began, as David Thomson observes in *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, with the

homely image of the 'wide-eyed drawling innocent, a country boy who had wandered into a crazy, sophisticated world'. However, by the fifties Stewart was increasingly cast against his accepted character and his roles began to show signs of 'frenzy and gloom . . . a troubled, querulous and lonely personality'. Is Lynch the Jimmy Stewart of Capra's *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) or the Jimmy Stewart of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)? Lynch's close friends will tell you that 'his strength is in joy'; Lynch himself, with a smile, that he is 'lost in darkness and confusion'.

This dichotomy was most evident with the release of *The Straight Story* – a heart-warming tale of rural America, sandwiched between the dark urban nightmare worlds of *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*. But if *The Straight Story* owes more to the painted worlds of Norman Rockwell, Andrew Wyeth and Grant Wood's classic 'American Gothic' than it does to Lynch's own fearful, murky canvases, the movie manages to be at once both completely personal and completely different from anything the director has ever done.

More recently Lynch has moved away from his beloved painting and into the world of the computer, concentrating on the digital manipulation of photographic images. That's when he's not designing furniture, making pottery, recording his own music and writing his first fully animated feature film *Snoot World* with Caroline Thompson – Tim Burton's collaborator on both *Edward Scissorhands* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

A glance at the bookshelves in Asymmetrical Productions, Lynch's independent company in the Hollywood hills, is as good a place as any to get one's bearings in Lynchland. The spines on view map out the terrain: *The Murderer Next Door*; *The Complete Do-it-Yourself Manual*; *Original Sin*; *Radical Golf*; *Getting Started in Film*; *Geek Love*; *Jackson Pollock*; *The Dark Room*; *Greetings from Minnesota*; *America Ground Zero*; *Harm's Way*; *Utopian Craftsmen* and *Homeboy*. As Lynch might say, go figure.

Chris Rodley

I

Shadow of a Twisted Hand Across My House

Childhood, memory and painting

David Lynch was born in Missoula, Montana; on 20 January 1946. In his own words, he was there 'just to be born' before the family moved – when he was only two months old – to Sandpoint, Idaho. His father, Donald, worked for the Government's Department of Agriculture as a research scientist and was subject to frequent transfer, consigning the Lynch household to an itinerant lifestyle. After only two years in Sandpoint, where Lynch's brother John was born, the family moved again to Spokane, Washington, where another child, Martha, became the newest addition to the family. From there it was on to Durham, North Carolina, then to Boise, Idaho, and finally to Alexandria, Virginia. Lynch was still only fourteen years old at that time.

It's tempting to see this peripatetic lifestyle as having contributed much of what is both unique and disquieting in Lynch's cinema. A highly developed sense of place, and the palpable influence exerted on people by their surroundings are, in his movies, often fused with the 'outsider' quality of his main characters. Both Henry in *Eraserhead* and Jeffrey in *Blue Velvet* are quintessential Lynchian alter egos: innocents (or children) struggling to comprehend their immediate environs and what is happening to them. And although the TV soap opera often takes its name from the place in which it is set, the town of Twin Peaks seems far more 'real' than any Dallas, Peyton Place or Knots Landing – despite being the site of all manner of inexplicable and paranormal activity.

Whatever the precise influence, Lynch has overtly and fruitfully plundered his childhood for images, sounds, textures and events in order to create work. It continues to provide a seemingly limitless personal resource; a highly specific and codified bank of sensory impressions, mysteries and clues. His absolute trust in the elusive meaning and relevance of these memories is what often invests his work with its electrical power; a short circuit to the core of the planet, apparently unmediated and unhindered by intellectualized concerns, and guided by a practice founded on intuition and atavism.

Lynch's account of his childhood has, over the years, emerged as a series of beautifully crafted 'snapshots'; mental Polaroids that are dense and imagistic, and which often combine humour and dread. He delights in playing with a particular repertoire of audiovisual references. These snapshots at once tantalize and deflect with their promise of revelation and offer of refuge. Michel Chion has suggested that the 'unreal precision of these evocations' may have been reconstituted from the American educational primer *Good Times in Our*

Streets – a classroom book to which Lynch has referred and which echoes the mode of his own recollections in its highly edited, comic-strip representations of middle America.

Whether or not Lynch consciously romanticizes, idealizes or even reconstructs an innocent, halcyon past, his account of childhood is evidence of a great storytelling ability – while a degree of privacy is guaranteed by the striking imagery he offers up. It's also symptomatic of the necessity for Lynch to communicate in a form of coded language that is uniquely his own. His mistrust of words, particularly in their efforts either to interpret or fix meaning, is something that surfaces constantly in his conversation. The autodidact in Lynch is very strong.

Perhaps that is why the playful four-word biography he chose for himself in 1990 – 'Eagle Scout, Missoula, Montana' – is so perfect. It humorously suggests the importance of place, keeps words to a minimum (telling us little or much), and slyly confesses to a very important aspect of his life – that of the ultimate DIY artist and director. As Lynch's friend of thirty-six years, Toby Keeler, has observed: 'David's always been a doer. When I first met him he was working on his merit badges to become an Eagle Scout. They don't just give those things away, and I think he achieved the highest level that you possibly can, although he doesn't like to speak about it much. Even today, his ability to make things out of nothing, I think, comes directly from that old motto "Be Prepared".'

In his review of *Lost Highway* for *Film Comment*, Donald Lyons rightly pointed out that it is a 'painter's movie'. Painting is literally where everything begins for Lynch, and is therefore the most appropriate place to start. His teenage realization that painting could be a legitimate profession marks the first major turning point in his life. As Toby Keeler recalls: 'When he found out about art and painting, he was possessed by it. And God, was he prolific!' Lynch all but dropped out of school, and dedicated himself to the 'Art Life' – a situation that, if not encouraged by his parents, was tolerated. The medium has never relinquished its grip on him. The dark, scumbled surfaces of his later canvases, occasionally visited by spindly characters stranded in a threatening neighbourhood of black paint and detritus, perfectly express the childlike wonder and terror that has triggered so much of his cinema.

RODLEY: *When you were a child your family moved regularly – from town to town, state to state. How did you feel about that very transient lifestyle?*

LYNCH: It's good and bad, you know, because you get all dug in in one place, and then suddenly you're some place else: you've gotta make new friends, you've gotta get the lay of the land. It's very good for some kids – they develop a skill for getting along – but for other kids it destroys them. But as parents, you don't know what kind of kids you have. You just have to move.

So which kind of kid were you?

I got the drill down pretty good. I could feel what needed to be done to get along. And then once you get in, then you can do what you want to do, but it's really hard if you're on the outside, it forces you to want to get on the inside and that takes a lot of time, and so you don't do what you should be doing.

Was it tough on you in terms of your schooling?

Yeah, but I'm not talking about education, I'm talking about other kids. When you're an outsider you can feel it, and that can get to you. Every kid feels that. But if you stay in one place and you're an outsider, it would be very nice to move and try it again! It's a shock to the system, but shocks to the system are sometimes really good. You get a little bit more aware, suddenly. Not like a hard hit on the head, but enough to jar some wiring. And some little channel opens up and you become, you know, a little bit more aware.

You've often spoken of your father and his work as a research scientist for the Department of Agriculture. What's your fondest memory of him?

Him walking to work dressed in a suit and a ten-gallon hat. When we lived in Virginia it was so embarrassing to me at the time that he wore this hat, but now I consider it totally cool. It was a grey-green, forest service, ten-gallon cowboy hat, and he'd put this hat on and walk out the door. He wouldn't go in a bus or car or anything, he'd just start walking and he'd walk several miles all the way across the George Washington Bridge into the city in that hat.

Was your mother a housewife, or did she also have a paid profession?

No, she didn't work. I'm not sure what degrees she's got, but she went to university. She did work for a while doing something, but I'm not sure, I can't remember.

How did your parents meet?

They met at Duke University. But in those days the father worked and the mother stayed at home. Mostly. Everywhere I was, that's what happened.

Growing up in the fifties seems to have greatly influenced your film work. Even though movies such as Blue Velvet *and* Lost Highway *are almost fiercely modern and contemporary, they're haunted by the fifties in both look and feel. Why are you so attached to that decade?*

1962. The Lynch family. Left to right:
John, David, Sunny, Martha and Donald.

If you go into the valley today you'll see cars from the fifties; if you turn on the radio, one station is Country and Western, one station is completely modern, and another is oldies but goodies. Elvis Presley, you know, came about. No matter how much music had been going before, rock 'n' roll was born then. The fifties are still here. They're all around. They never went away.

It was a fantastic decade in a lot of ways. Cars were made by the right kind of people. Designers were really out there with fins and chrome and really amazing stuff. Horse-power was a big deal, and kids knew every model, and would be waiting for the next year's stuff to come out. They knew all the specs on the cars and stuff like this. They were like sculpture, you know, that moved. Now, because they got a computer to aerodynamically design the car, it cuts through the air better and you get better gas-mileage and you don't get the back end of the car rising up when you go a hundred miles an hour. Old cars would weather a crash but the people inside would just be like, you know, *mutilated*! But I'm telling you, the thrill is *gone*. B. B. King might've been singing about this *crap* that we drive around now!

So there was something in the air that is not there any more *at all*. It was such a great feeling, and not just because I was a kid. It was a really

hopeful time, and things were going up instead of going down. You got the feeling you could do anything. The future was bright. Little did we know we were laying the groundwork then for a disastrous future. All the problems were there, but it was somehow glossed over. And then the gloss broke, or rotted, and it all came oozing out.

When you say all the problems were there, what are you thinking of?
Well, pollution was really good and started. Plastics were coming in, weird studies of chemicals and co-polymers and a lot of medical experiments, the atomic bomb and a lot of, you know, testing. It was like the world was so huge you could dump a bunch of stuff and it's not gonna matter, right? It just kinda got out of control.

In the 1990 press kit for Wild at Heart *you distilled your biography down to four words: 'Eagle Scout, Missoula, Montana'. Why?*
Well, there's cub scouts, and there's boy scouts. These are good organizations, but somewhere along the line they became so *not* cool that it wasn't funny! And it became so not cool during the years that I was in the boy scouts! So it was almost like an embarrassment, and a shameful sort of thing. It just wasn't hip. And an eagle scout is the top! I became one so I could quit, and put it behind me. And my father, bless his heart, used to say, 'One day, you'll be proud that you did that.' So I put it on my resumé!

Weren't you present as an Eagle Scout at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy?
Yeah. The Eagle Scouts were asked to seat VIPs in these bleachers outside the White House. It was the coldest inauguration in history – 1961, January 20th, which is also my birthday. So I'm down in the snow, in the freezing cold, by a gate to the White House. And we were told that these limos were going to come out at one of five gates. So we'd have to race to the top of the bleachers, look over the wall, and see if they were coming.

I saw them winding their way down to the gate where I was, and came running down, but the secret-service people were telling everyone to move back. So I turned and started to go, and this secret-service man said, 'You!' And I turned, and he was pointing to me, and I said, 'Me?' and he says, 'Yeah, come here.' He brought me over and stood me between him and another secret-service guy in a wall of secret-service men straddling this little road by the gate. And I'm facing more secret-service men on the other side of the road.

The gates swung open and out came these two cars, rolling slowly, and they came right in front of me. The glass was a foot in front of my face. And as they glided by I saw, in the first car, President Eisenhower and soon-to-be President Kennedy. They were in high hats and they were talking. Ike was closest to me, and Kennedy was about five or six feet away. And then this next car glided by and in it was Johnson and Nixon, and they were *not* talking. Years later, I realized I saw four consecutive presidents in that brief little moment, standing between two secret-service guys.

What do you remember about the Kennedy assassination?
That was, you know, very bad. I was actually setting up a display in the front lobby of the High School, so I heard it before anybody else. But then they made an announcement and school was let out. Judy Westerman, my girlfriend at the time, was a Catholic, and she had a bond with this President like you couldn't *believe*! She was, you know, sobbing, so I took her home. She went into her room and didn't come out for four days!

It was weird because TV coverage of things happened before that, but here was everybody sitting around in rooms looking at the same thing. And everybody saw Jack Ruby kill Oswald. It was called the 'Four Dark Days' and ironically Judy was in her darkened bedroom for those four days, so it was really dark for her!

Looking at your work, one might surmise that you were frightened by many things as a child. Were you?
Many things. But troubled, more than living in fear. Really *troubled*. I would think, 'This is not the way it is supposed to be', and it would trouble me. It was a suspicion on my part, but almost a knowing.

You once said that your younger sister, Martha, was also afraid, but of green peas! Is that true?
Yeah. I think it was something to do with the consistency and strength of the outer surface, and then what was inside when you broke that membrane. It was more to do with the hardness of the outside and the softness of the inside than a flavour. But I don't know, you'd have to ask her. It was a big thing in our family, and she'd hide them.

Why didn't your parents just stop giving her peas?
Well, it was a thing about vegetables, you know?

That they're good for you?

The way we were. Childhood Christmas for Martha, John and David Lynch.

Yeah.

But not if you're scared of them . . .
No, no, it's not. It's not good. Try a different vegetable. Something's got to work!

Is it clear to your parents now that you were a troubled child, even if they weren't aware of it at the time?
Well, I think every child has things they see, that affect them, and it's nobody's fault. It's just the way it is. It's just the way a kid's mind works. It's maybe 75 per cent dream, 25 per cent reality.

You were very frightened of the city as a child, weren't you? Even as a young man.
Right, but I think if you grow up in the city, you're frightened by the country and if you grow up in the country you're frightened by the city. Because my grandparents on my mother's side lived in Brooklyn, I would go to New York City and I would see these things. And it scared the hell out of me. In the subway I remember a wind from the approaching train,

then a smell and a sound. I had a taste of horror every time I went to New York.

My grandfather owned an apartment building in Brooklyn with no kitchens. A man was cooking an egg on *an iron* – that really worried me. And every night he unscrewed his car aerial so gangs wouldn't break it off. I could just *feel* fear in the air. It was great fuel for future fires.

In what sense?

I learned that just beneath the surface there's another world, and still different worlds as you dig deeper. I knew it as a kid, but I couldn't find the proof. It was just a feeling. There is goodness in blue skies and flowers, but another force – a wild pain and decay – also accompanies everything. Like with scientists: they start on the surface of something, and then they start delving. They get down to the subatomic particles and their world is now very abstract. They're like abstract painters in a way. It'd be hard to talk to them because they're way down in there.

How and when did you first become interested in art?

When I was little I used to draw and paint all the time. One thing I thank my mother for is that she refused to give me colouring books because it's like a restricting thing. And my father, working for the Government, had reams of paper that he'd bring home. I mostly drew ammunition and pistols and airplanes, because the war was just over, and this was, I guess, in the air still. I had my own helmet, and an army belt and a canteen, and these wooden rifles. And I would draw them because they were part of my world. I mostly drew Browning Automatic water-cooled submachine-guns. That was a favourite.

When I was about fourteen, I went with my grandparents, on my father's side, up to Montana. My grandfather was going back to his ranch where my father grew up and they dropped me off in Hungry Horse with my Aunt Nonie Krall. There are two hundred people in this town, and it's right near Hungry Horse Dam, and they've got all these novelty shops with these real thin little horses. My Aunt Nonie and Uncle Bill had a drugstore, and next door to my aunt's house was a painter named Ace Powell who was in the school of Charlie Russell and Remington. I used to go over there and draw. He and his wife were both painters, and they always had paper and all this kind of stuff. But it was so removed, off in this western corner, that it never clicked that painting was like a real thing – I thought it was a western sort of thing.

Gun crazy. Lynch (seven years old) and assembled troops.

So when did you realize that to be a painter was a legitimate profession?

We'd moved to Virginia and I didn't know what I was going to do. I just didn't have a clue. Except I just liked painting. My father was a scientist so I thought maybe I was going to be a scientist. I was, like, not thinking at all – *zero* original thoughts! I met my friend Toby Keeler in the front yard of my girlfriend's house – Linda Styles. And Toby did two things: he told me that his father was a painter, which completely changed my life, and he also stole my girlfriend!

So I went to visit his father's studio in Georgetown, and his father was a really cool guy. He was still on his own, he wasn't part of the painting world really, and yet he was, you know, devoting his life to this, and it thrilled my soul. And so I became friends with his father – Bushnell Keeler – and that decided this course for painting, 100 per cent right then. I was in the ninth grade. He also turned me on to this book by Robert Henri called *The Art Spirit* that sort of became my Bible, because that book made the rules for the art life. It was one of those things that is so fantastic, because it sets you on your way – meeting Toby in the front yard of Linda Styles's house . . . 1960, '61 maybe.

Many of your paintings from the late eighties/early nineties are based around the house: Shadow of a Twisted Hand Across My House, Ants In

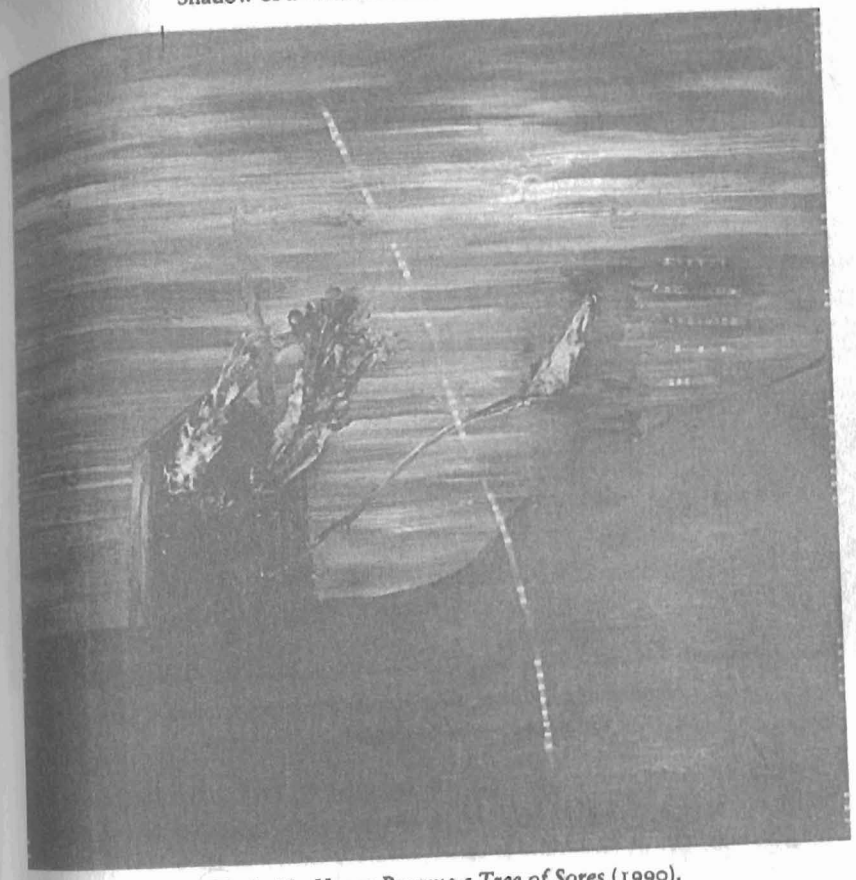
My House, *or* Suddenly My House Became a Tree of Sores. *Why?*
A lot of my paintings come from memories of Boise, Idaho, and Spokane, Washington. Some people, just by their nature, think about the President of the United States and Africa and Asia. Their mind thinks over thousands of miles, big problems and big situations. That just completely leaves me cold. I can't get there. I like to think about a neighbourhood – like a fence, like a ditch, and somebody digging a hole, and then a girl in this house, and a tree, and what's happening in that tree – a little local place that I can get into. The two are really the same: it's all based on human nature and the same sorts of things.

The home is often seen as a threatening place in the paintings. In House and Garden, *for instance, the garden is made up of congealed Band-Aids. It's more like a grave than a garden. Why is that?*
The home is a place where things can go wrong. When I was a child, home seemed claustrophobic but that wasn't because I had a bad family. A home is like a nest – it's only useful for so long. I use Band-Aids in my paintings because I like their colour, and I like the way they have a connection with sores. Cotton has a similar appeal – it has a sort of medical feeling to it.

My father frequently experimented on tree diseases and insects. He had huge forests at his disposal to experiment on. So I was exposed to insects, disease and growth, in an organic sort of world, like a forest, or even a garden. And this sort of thrills me – this earth, and then these plants coming out, and then there's the things crawling on them and the activity in a garden – so many textures, and movements. You could just get lost for ever. And there are lots of things that are attacking the garden. There's a lot of slaughter and death, diseases, worms, grubs, ants. A lotta stuff going on.

You seem to like going in close on situations, not content with appearances. Like the opening sequence of Blue Velvet: *from the idyllic carapace of a neighbourhood to the teeming insects under the front lawn of a house.*
A *National Geographic* photo of a garden is just the most *beautiful* thing. Or a pine tree against a blue sky with a couple of puffy white clouds does something to you. But if you take one step closer, you see that each tree has got a lot to overcome to get to that size. As a gardener you have to stay on top of an awful lot of things.

My childhood was elegant homes, tree-lined streets, the milkman, building backyard forts, droning airplanes, blue skies, picket fences, green grass, cherry trees. Middle America as it's supposed to be. But on the cherry tree there's this pitch oozing out – some black, some yellow, and



Suddenly My House Became a Tree of Sores (1990).
Oil and mixed media on canvas. 168 x 173cm.

millions of red ants crawling all over it. I discovered that if one looks a little closer at this beautiful world, there are *always* red ants underneath. Because I grew up in a perfect world, other things were a contrast.

I saw life in extreme close-ups. In one, for instance, saliva mixed with blood. Or long shots of a peaceful environment. I had lots of friends but I loved being alone and looking at insects swarming in the garden.

In the painting Shadow of a Twisted Hand Across My House, *the hand is huge compared with the house. There's a sense of dread outside the home.*
Exactly. Sometimes in the paintings the proportions are strange, so, like, a bug is bigger and the house is smaller. It's a torment. I'm not alone in that.

Shadow of a Twisted Hand Across My House (1988).
Oil and mixed media on canvas. 165 x 210cm.

People feel that outside the house – unfortunately, even *inside* the house in a lot of cases – there are problems to be dealt with. And they're not going to go away with wishful thinking.

What about the painting Mom's Home and She's Really Mad? *Again she's very large compared with the house. Fathers are more commonly seen in this threatening way. Why is it the mother in this case?*
Uhuh. I don't know why. Um . . . I don't know if this has anything to do psychologically with me, or just some idea.

Generally, your paintings strongly evoke the world of a terror-stricken child. Your early short films The Alphabet *and* The Grandmother *seem to come from the same place. They don't look like remembrances of a happy childhood.*
No. But I had an idyllic childhood. The only thing that disturbs me is that many psychopaths say they had a very happy childhood. So I say, 'Wait a minute, did I *really* have a happy childhood?' And the answer is pretty

simple: I had a very happy childhood. I look back on it with very pleasant memories. There's some line I read about the longing for the euphoria of forgotten childhood dreams. And it *was* like a dream because the world was so small. I can't remember being able to see more than a couple of blocks. What happened after that couple of blocks was not part of me – *zero!* And those couple of blocks are huge.

So all the little details are blown out of proportion. And there's happiness in one yard, one fence, or one piece of light on something. And hours could be spent in one tiny locale at the corner of a yard. Sometimes those memories get unlocked, and I get a euphoria. In the mind of a kid, everything seemed peacefully beautiful. Airplanes passed by slowly in the sky. Rubber toys floated on the water. Meals seemed to last five years and nap time seemed endless.

You've said that your childhood was like a dream. Do you think, therefore, that we tend to fictionalize our past?
We favour ourselves in all our memories. We make ourselves act better in the past and make better decisions and we're nicer to people and we take more credit than we probably deserve. We candy-coat like crazy so we can go forward and live. An accurate memory of the past would be depressing, probably.

So how much of one's memory can one really rely on?
Well, like Fred Madison says in *Lost Highway*, 'I prefer to remember things my own way.' Everybody does that to a certain degree. But most of the day was a dream. You can always escape into your mind, and slip into a completely different world.

Given that you draw on a past to such an extent in your work, is it sometimes hard to access memories and events from childhood?
Well, if you were told to access them, that would be hard. But sometimes you're focused in a certain area that reminds you of something, and then those things start occurring. But I've had experiences where I've had a moment's flash – it seems like a memory. And it comes with a fantastic feeling of happiness, but I can't for the life of me think *where* that thing occurred. The *feel* is so real, but I can't remember when that would've been. And they're such small fragments, they don't give me enough clues to know whether they really did happen.

Do you find more memories unlock the older you get?

Yeah. I think it's a safety thing. You get so involved in things when you get older, and that stops you being able to see these little details, and have that same sort of experience. So every once in a while, something pops and you go back. Some little detail. It's real important to go out and sit down and look at things quietly from a low perspective. When you're small, you're always looking up at things, and if you can get down, and look up, and study stuff, it's sort of the same again. Except you know so much. That wrecks a lot of it.

But there's so much mystery when you're a child. Something as simple as a tree doesn't make sense. You see it in the distance and it looks small, but as you get closer it seems to grow – you haven't got a handle on the rules yet. We think we understand the rules when we become adults, but what we've really experienced is a narrowing of the imagination. I found the world completely and totally fantastic as a child. Of course, I had the usual fears, like going to school – I know there was some sort of problem there. But every other person sensed that problem too, so my fears were pretty normal. For me, back then, school was a crime against young people. It destroyed the seeds of liberty. The teachers didn't encourage knowledge or a positive attitude. The people who interested me didn't go to school.

I feel between nine and seventeen most of the time, and sometimes around six! Darkness has crept in since then. The darkness is realizations about the world and human nature and my own nature, all combined into one ball of sludge.

But whether things happened exactly the way you remember them or not, memories of your own childhood seem to provide you with continued source material.

Yeah, that's right. And there's always new stuff, you know, going on too. The old and the new sometimes connect in beautiful ways.

What's so satisfying to you about painting, and why do you still feel compelled to do it?

Well, you can sit in a chair – and I love just sitting in a chair and going off – and float away. And sometimes, when I'm going to sleep, especially, or sitting in a chair with my eyes closed . . . I drift through this one space where images just come, and I'm not prompting them. In fact, if I start thinking about it, they stop. And because I don't judge them and don't think about them too much, they just come in. They're usually in a series of things. Like, if it's a face, the next face is just a little bit different from

the first face: it's all in the same line. And some of these ideas or images are kind of thrilling. To paint something is a way of catching them in a more permanent way. Then you have a thing that you can look at. Ninety-nine per cent of these images you can't remember a week later. And a painting kind of reminds you of those; also it exists. And you work it up to a place where you say it's done, and it's pleasing – it's a little bit of a thrill to have it, and to have experienced it.

I have this thing about when you listen to someone like a teacher. If you draw while you listen to the teacher, the drawing may not have anything to do with what you're hearing, but if you're tested on what he or she said, all you have to do is run your finger over the drawing and the words – what was said – are recorded in there. It's like you're a needle on a record and it's *weird*.

Dreamtime is an obvious cornerstone of your cinema. Is it important in your life?

Waking dreams are the ones that are important, the ones that come when I'm quietly sitting in a chair, gently letting my mind wander. When you sleep, you don't control your dream. I like to dive into a dream world that I've made or discovered; a world I choose.

When you've had a really bad dream and you wake up and you remember it and you tell a friend what happened, it's not terrifying. You can see on their face that this is not the scary story you thought it was.

But right there is the power of cinema. And even that can't get it, because the dreamer has bought it 1,000 per cent for himself or herself. The dream was played just for them. It's so unique and powerful to that person. But with sounds and situations and time you could get much closer to putting that together for somebody else with a film.

But when you've had that bad dream, what is the nature of the missing element that is so difficult to communicate to others?

It's the subjective thing. It wouldn't strike Bob the way it strikes Sam and the way it strikes Susie. They're all coming from a different place. It could be such an absurd thing in the dream that makes you afraid, but it works for *you*. But that fear is just too abstract. My friend Jack Fisk had a recurring dream about a tyre. It's rolling on a shelf in a garage. And it rolls, and it almost goes over, and then it rolls back. And it rolls the other way, and almost goes over. Just that tyre rolling scared him. But go figure, you know! The essential ingredient is completely unable to be communicated.

There must be some added information coming in in some way. So a little kernel is charged with certain knowledge.

That was communicated to me in Wild at Heart, *in the car crash sequence where Sherilyn Fenn is wandering around, going on about her lipstick and her bag, and her brains are coming out. Laura Dern is screaming, and a simple, chilling piece of Angelo Badalamenti music is playing. Everything contributes to a terrifying and deeply melancholic moment. How do you even begin to orchestrate that?*

The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. *Sometimes.* It's hard to explain about those things. Except when you have a chance to put stuff together you have choices that you can make. And so you talk and you listen and you think and you feel till you get something that seems to be working. But you try that with every scene.

Presumably that scene was in the script. Did it emerge as anything like what was written?

No. But that's true with everything I do. You see fate working sometimes. And sometimes it can be working against you, and sometimes it can be working for you. And you see that you have to do your part. There are so many other things that you think you're controlling, but you're not. With that scene I sat down with Angelo and I told him what I wanted. You know, this kinda simple, childlike thing, rooted in the fifties. And Angelo starts. He could play anything, he's just been schooled in all the stuff. So, he starts playing, and I talk to him, and then he starts playing something else, and then I talk, because I'm reacting to what's coming out, and he's trying to get a wind of what I really mean. So you start one place and you keep going. And then, as soon as I get excited, he *knows* it. And he plays the whole thing. And then we put it with the image. And BOOM! I'll tell you: that piece of music is what adds 80 per cent of the horror of that scene. It's the emotion of the scene.

When you started looking at other established painters, who really struck you?

Francis Bacon is, to me, the main guy, the number one kinda hero painter. There's a lot of painters that I like. But for just the *thrill* of standing in front of a painting . . . I saw Bacon's show in the sixties at the Marlborough Gallery and it was really one of the most powerful things I ever saw in my life.

What excited you most about Bacon? The use of the paint, or the subject matter?

Everything. The subject matter and the style were united, married, perfect. And the space, and the slow and the fast and, you know, the textures, everything. Normally I only like a couple of years of a painter's work, but I like everything of Bacon's. The guy, you know, had the stuff.

He stuck very much to painting the same picture over and over.

But, so what? I say! Now, once you do two films that are similar, people are just dying for the new thing. It's sad that it can only run so long. The worst thing I ever saw was at the Cannes Film Festival where the audience booed a Fellini film. It was the night before *Wild at Heart* was shown, and they booed his film. I don't care what the picture is, it just killed me. It *killed* me. The guy had reached a point where he should have been respected.

Bacon's paintings often imply a narrative, but it's unclear exactly what is going on. Does that interest you?

Exactly right. Fragments of narrative. If Bacon had made a movie, what would it have been and where would it have gone? And how would the cinema translate those textures and those spaces? *Last Tango in Paris* was very influenced by Bacon. But there's something about that painting. That's what he should have been doing, and that's what he was a master at. Edward Hopper is another guy I love, but more for cinema than for painting. Instantly, when you see those works, you dream. And the same thing happened to me with Bacon – I can always take off from his paintings, like I can with a piece of music.

You once said that when you paint you try to 'stay out of the way' most of the time. What did you mean by that?

Well, it's like the Japanese with the garden. Nature is doing all this stuff, and all they do is maybe take a branch and trim it, impose their will on it, and make it grow a certain way. And they prune, and they keep certain things out. But the plants are doing most of the work. It's a two-way street – nature and man working together. And in painting, the paint has got a texture and it sort of wants to be a certain way. And a brush is so artificial, and it makes tiny little lines. After you make a whole bunch of brush strokes, it's something else. It's not the paint talking, it's too much of the person. So you've gotta let accidents and strange things happen – let it work, so it's got an organic sort of quality. That's all I meant.

I admire people who have an idea and then they paint that idea. That could never, never happen to me. And I don't know why that is. As soon as I start, it immediately becomes something else.

Like the Surrealists and automatic writing?
Yeah. It's sort of like, if you could take bits of writing that you did sometime, or even somebody else did sometime, and just chop them up and arrange them at random, and just throw them, you know, like people have done, and then read that, it could be fantastic. It could spark a whole other thing. And you always have to leave an opening for other forces, you know, to do their thing. When you're on your own, just writing these things down, it's so limited, and you wanna somehow open it up and throw it out and let other things intervene. More ideas come out of that, and it becomes really unbelievable. By trying to remove yourself you can see some fantastic things sometimes.

Moving paint around with my fingers and letting everything go on automatic pilot I sort of get into . . . I don't know exactly what, but I think it has a lot to do with childhood occurrences. For me, the fact that they're childlike doesn't cancel out the sexuality in the paintings because I think children are pretty hip sexually. They don't know the words for it and have clumsy ways of expressing it, but there's certainly a lot going on sexually that we don't fully understand when we're kids.

I'd like to bite my paintings, but I can't because there's lead in the paint. Which means I'm kind of chicken. I don't feel I've really gotten in there yet, and the paintings still seem safe and tranquil to me.

You've also said that the locations of your paintings could be anywhere, but that your movies take place in America.
The painting comes from the paint, and action and reaction. As to exactly where they are, well . . . some people open windows in houses, but I like to go deeper into a house and find things underneath things. Maybe that's where they are. I love factories too. A serene landscape is totally boring to me. I like the idea of man and earth together – like a pit mine with heavy machinery and maybe some pools with sediment, and all sorts of little organisms growing, and mosquitoes lifting off like little helicopters.

But I like certain things about America and it gives me ideas. When I go around and I see things, it sparks little stories, or little characters pop out, so it just feels right to me to, you know, make American films.

Is that something to do with the nature of the photographic image? That you have to point the camera at something, and that to make a film which takes place 'nowhere' is difficult?
Well, I like the nowhere part of America. *Eraserhead* is an American film, but it's a little bit in an in-between place. It's like a dirty, little, forgotten, hidden corner. And I love those areas. You can discover secrets. They're little truthful places, but they're not obvious. You have to sink in and find them, and you don't even know sort of what they are till the elements come together. Then they start talking to you and you start seeing more about the truth of the thing. At first you fall in love with them but you haven't started sinking in yet.

This idea about making a film about 'nowhere' – is The Red Room in Twin Peaks *one of those places?*
Yes. There's no problem with time. And anything can happen. It's a free zone, completely unpredictable and therefore pretty exciting but also scary. And those kinds of places are just fantastic to visit. And a pine tree and a cup of coffee – the combination of those things is pretty dramatic to me. [Laughs.]

Another time, another place. Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) and The Man from Another Place (Michael Anderson) in The Red Room.

The basic 'ground' of the paintings comprises a very restricted palette. They're very dark, reminiscent of ash, mud, congealed blood etc. – very little colour. Why?
I wouldn't know what to do with it. Colour to me is too real. It's limiting. It doesn't allow too much of a dream. The more you throw black into a colour, the more dreamy it gets. I could try one tube of cadmium yellow to 500 tubes of black. That could be one way to use it.

What, for you, is the association of black and dreaming?
Black has depth. It's like a little egress; you can go into it, and because it keeps on continuing to be dark, the mind kicks in, and a lot of things that are going on in there become manifest. And you start seeing what you're afraid of. You start seeing what you love, and it becomes like a dream.

How would you describe the figures in your paintings?
Well, they're like fragments of a body or something like that. I can't do a whole figure, and I don't know why that is. Bacon could paint a figure but it's impossible for me to do the whole thing. I sometimes paint too much of one and then I have to destroy a lot of it.

They also appear to be in transit, perhaps hastily trying to get out of the picture, crossing the surface. They certainly don't look like they want to hang around. Would you agree?
Yeah. They're in trouble, maybe. I don't know. The paintings have a fearful mood, but there's humour in them too. But ultimately, I guess the central idea is, you know, life in darkness and confusion – and I'm certainly there: lost in darkness and confusion.

You know what dogs are like in a room? They really look like they're having fun. They're bouncing this ball around and chewing on stuff and they're kind of panting and happy. Human beings are supposed to be like that. We should be pretty happy. And I don't know why we aren't.

Does the darkness and confusion ever abate, or does it get worse? And is it actually necessary to your work?
It does go away. And it will go away for everyone. I really believe this isn't the way it's going to be for ever. I don't know why it's necessary that we get lost in this darkness and confusion, but part of it is *really* enjoyable. But then, if you get sick or you get tortured, or shot, it's not enjoyable. Or your heart gets broken, or your house catches on fire.

By making work are you able to bring an order to the darkness and confusion in a way that is impossible to do in real life?
Yeah, yeah, exactly right. Films and paintings are all things that you control. To take an idea and translate it into something material is a beautiful process. It's thrilling to the soul! Who knows why? And that, to me, is the best thing you can be doing.

There's an awkwardness about the painted figures; they're spindly-legged, rickety, clumsy. They might have a problem doing the simplest of things. I'm reminded of certain scenes in your films, such as the one in Twin Peaks *when Dale Cooper and Sheriff Harry Truman have terrible problems with some swivel chairs when they're visiting a traumatized Ronette Pulaski in hospital.*
Well, one of my favourite films is *Lolita*, and one of the greatest scenes features this folding bed. The bell hop and James Mason put this bed in the room when Sue Lyon is asleep, and they don't wanna wake her up. Some people are not mechanically minded, and some machines are simple things that are not user-friendly. There are so many absurd things in that. When we were shooting that scene in *Twin Peaks*, the chairs were there, but then things started to develop. Cooper and Sheriff Truman have to be quiet; Ronette's obviously very disturbed and so it puts a tension in there and an absurd sort of humour at the same time. And it's a truth of life that some things are not built so well and they become complicated and they need to be figured out and they're hard to figure out.

For the figures in your paintings, and the characters in your films, life seems to be a difficult balancing act. Sometimes literally, as in the way they walk. Like Bobby in Twin Peaks, *for example.*
Yes. We're all striving for balance, in my mind. It's the ultimate goal. And it's such a heavy thing, you know, perfect balance. I think a kind of euphoria comes out of a perfect balance. Sometimes things rush together and there's a balance somehow, but it's fleeting. Someday it will be a permanent thing. It moves you to another place. Here, people are very unbalanced. Everything is swinging, to try to get there, but it never gets there. And I think the reason it never gets there is people are not dealing with a full deck and so they're always *re*acting, and their reactions are without deep thought. They're reacting not so much with their reasoning mind. It's an emotional thing mostly, and so it's always going to be very crazy.

Given that the notion of 'balance' is so important to you, would you say – for example – that the character of Jeffrey Beaumont achieves a kind of balance by the end of Blue Velvet?
That's just like a partial portrait. In the real Jeffrey Beaumont there'd be a million other thoughts that are not shown in the film – another whole series of turmoils and wanderings. It's impossible to show the full thing. But you could say that maybe he learns something, and it's like a step on the road toward something. But that's about it. He had an experience and he gleaned some stuff from it.

The paintings also lack any sense of a light source. They seem to depict dark, loveless worlds. Is that true?
It's the darker things I find really beautiful. I guess I haven't learned to paint the lighter parts of life in a way that's pleasing to me, although I think it can be done – Rousseau does it, and so does Richard Diebenkorn, in a way. But all my paintings are organic, violent comedies. They have to be violently done and primitive and crude, and to achieve that I try to let nature paint more than I paint.

But there's the relationship of shapes, one to another, that are pleasing. And just this word 'pleasing' gets into something maybe about love. If something is really pleasing you say you love it. And it thrills you in some way. So even though they're on the dark side, there are very pleasing things happening, but they just have to be this way for me to, you know, really love them.

The paintings often feature individual letters cut out and pasted down to make sentences. Again I was reminded of Twin Peaks *and the letters Killer Bob places under his victim's fingernails. And of course your first short film,* The Alphabet. *What fascinates you about letters and words?*
The words in the paintings are sometimes important to make you start thinking about what else is going on in there. And a lot of times, the words excite me as shapes, and something'll grow out of that. I used to cut these little letters out and glue them on. They just look good all lined up like teeth. I'd glue them on with this stuff that reminds me of ointment. The words change the way you perceive what's happening in the picture. And they're a nice balance to other things going on. And sometimes they become the title of the painting.

A word is also a texture. As you're driving along you see wires, you see clouds and blue sky or smog, and you see many, many words and images. You see signs and weird lights and the people just get lost. A person

doesn't have enough weight. They're overpowered. And this I really don't like. I like a very sparse room. And I like a room that has some irregularities in it. But it's all like a number – a bare room has a number of 2. And then when you put a person in there, that person is a *strong* 7. Suddenly you can see the person, and you see the way their face is and the way they move – like in *Eraserhead*. *Wild at Heart* is way more busy. It built up a kind of mania, a craziness in the world. That's what it was about.

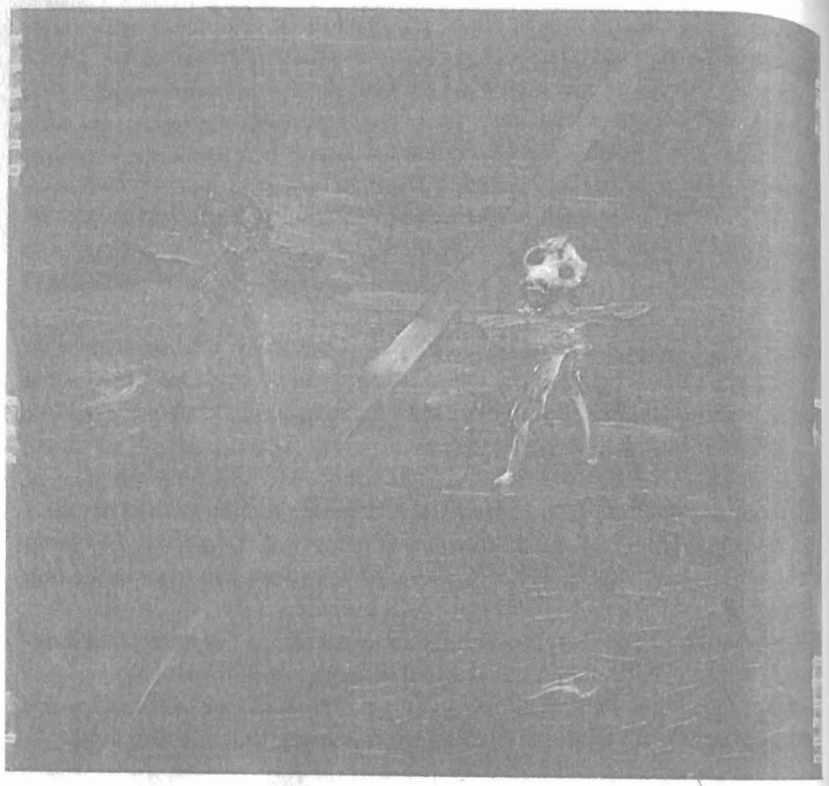
You say that a word can be a texture. You've always been particularly fascinated by texture, haven't you?
Yeah. I'm obsessed with textures. We're surrounded by so much vinyl that I find myself constantly in pursuit of other textures. One time I used some hair remover to remove all the fur from a mouse to see what it looked like – and it looked beautiful.

There's one painting called I See Myself. *It looks like two sides of the same thing. One figure is dark and the other is white and skeletal. It's like looking across some divide. What occurred to you when you were doing that picture?*
Well, we all have at least two sides. One of the things I've heard is that our trip through life is to gain divine mind through knowledge and experience of combined opposites. And that's our trip. The world we live in is a world of opposites. And to reconcile those two opposing things is the trick.

Are they opposed, in the sense that one is good and the other is bad?
Well, it has to be that way. I don't know why [laughs] but um . . . er . . . I don't know quite what to say to you there, Chris, about that! They're just opposites, you know, that's all. And then that means there's something in the middle. And the middle isn't a compromise, it's, like, the power of both.

People are often disturbed by the darker side of their own psyches. You seem relatively comfortable with yours. Why is that?
I have no idea. I've always been that way. I've always liked both sides and believe that in order to appreciate one you have to know the other – the more darkness you can gather up, the more light you can see too.

When that dark side is articulated or expressed in your work, is it difficult for your family to relate to it?
See, that's what I have a problem with, because it shouldn't really be a



I See Myself (1992). Oil and mixed media on canvas. 72 x 76cm.

worry. I know it is, but you're just doing your job, and it's fantastic. You're lucky that you love it and you can do it. And the part that comes after makes you feel funny. Because it's like a zoo.

But it is a risky business doing anything creative in a public sense.
Well, there's plenty to see when you put something up there. And you open yourself up to lots and lots of things. That's not why you do it, but that's what happens. If there's a down side, you know, that's it. See, I'm from Missoula, Montana, you know? I'm a regular guy.

Are you saying that everyone in Missoula, Montana, is 'regular' by definition?
[Laughs.] Well, now when you say you're from Montana people begin to worry because the Uni-bomber was living up there. And a lot of people

end up going into the woods who, you know, have a coupla screws loose. That's one place – the woods – you can go, and run things your own way, far away from anybody that would interfere – like the Government, and the tax people, things like that.

You've been affectionately dubbed 'Jimmy Stewart from Mars' which, in part, is meant to signify an apparent difference between the kind of work you make and the kind of person you appear to be. You've been called 'a contradiction' by many people. Do you think that's true?
It's sorta true because you have an interior and an exterior and sometimes they're in contradiction – everybody, every human.

But with some people maybe that gap is more pronounced. Is that true of you?
Maybe so. A big gap! In the synapses!

This issue often arises with David Cronenberg. He looks and sounds like a regular, balanced guy and yet he creates disturbed, cinematic nightmares. So the question arises: is he basically a madman who, in order to function, assumes the manner of a regular guy? Or is it because he's basically a regular guy that he needs to let rip in other, very public, ways? Which comes first?
He's both things. That's just the way it is. The stuff that comes out in the work is, I think, a lot more truthful than the way you are just walking around. It's like the tip of the iceberg's walking around and a lot of the time it doesn't have anything to do with what's going on inside.

Just thinking about the little one really sees, another painting – Billy Finds a Book of Riddles Right in His Own Back Yard – *immediately reminded me of Jeffrey finding the ear on a bit of waste ground in* Blue Velvet. *What is it about finding something in your neighbourhood that fascinates you?*
Well, imagine if you *did* find a book of riddles, and you *could* start unravelling them, but they were really complicated. Mysteries would become apparent and thrill you. We all find this book of riddles and it's just what's going on. And you can figure them out. The problem is, you figure them out inside yourself, and even if you told somebody, they wouldn't believe you or understand it in the same way you do. You'd suddenly realize that the communication wasn't 100 per cent. There are a lot of things like that going on in life, and words just fail you.

The neat thing about film is that it can tell a little bit of a certain side of

that thing that words couldn't tell. But it won't tell the whole story, because there are so many clues and feelings in the world that it makes a mystery and a mystery means there's a puzzle to be solved. Once you start thinking like that you're hooked on finding a meaning, and there are many avenues in life where we're given little indications that the mystery can be solved. We get little proofs – not the big proof – but little proofs that keep us going.

That there is a mystery is a HUGE THRILL. That there's more going on than meets the eye is a thrilling thing. Let's say that you could see something and mistake it for something else – a man walking across a window at night with something in his hand. Maybe you saw exactly what you thought you saw, and all of your imaginings are exactly what is going on. But more often than not, if you were actually able to go in there and see what was really happening, it would be a let-down from your imagination trip. So I think fragments of things are pretty interesting. You can dream the rest. Then you're a participant. We know that things are going on. Not in every house, but enough. Things that we can't even imagine are going on. And that's why all these talk shows on TV are happening. People come on and say these things. It's like a cleansing. It's like you always sort of knew it, and now they're naming it and showing it. But therefore a lot of mystery is going away.

But it's almost become the new banality. Everyone is remembering that they were abused as children. It's like, who wasn't?
Yeah, but now they're saying there's a need in a patient to think something has gone on, when in fact it didn't. It's conjured up some way and it ruins the whole family. And no one believes that it didn't happen, because that's the way things are right now: people believe the worst.

Does that force the film-maker or artist to make the 'evil' completely unimaginable or extreme, like Frank Booth in Blue Velvet*?*
I guess it pushes you further out. Or further in. Or you get a different angle on it.

Given that you began painting as a child, and have continued to paint, do you sense that it is still the primary activity for you, from which everything else comes?
It is. There are things about painting that are true for everything in life. That's the way painting is. Music is also one of those things. There are things that can't be said with words. And that's sort of what painting is all about. And that's what film-making, to me, is mostly about. There are

words and there are stories, but there are things that can be said with film that you can't say with words. It's just the beautiful language of cinema. And it has to do with time and juxtapositions and all the rules in painting. Painting is one thing that carries through everything else.

Do you feel you know more about painting than cinema?
I don't know that much about either one, really. There's a kind of a 'knowing', and then there's an intellectual knowing. I'm not the kind of person that can get up in front of people and start talking about how it's done. It doesn't work that way for me. If you're sitting in front of a painting and it's part-way going and it starts talking to you, then you act and react. You're going with a kind of a subconscious intuition kind of thing. And things unfold. It's the same way with a scene in a film: you can have it in the script but when it's in front of you, it's fluid. If a line doesn't work, you adjust it – you see it has to be *this* way. You see that the light has to be a certain way, the pace has to be a certain way. It's talking to you. Unfortunately, only when all the elements are together does it really talk to you. So you've got to be on your toes. You've got to be on guard. You've got to be in that world.

That's why *Eraserhead* was so beautiful for me because I was able to sink into that world and live in there. There *was* no other world. I hear songs sometimes that people say were very popular at the time, and I haven't a clue, and I was *there*. And that's the most beautiful thing – to get lost in a world. And because of the money and the pressure now, it's almost like a catastrophe. Making pictures has gotten too fast. Many pictures skim along the surface. They can't delve deep because, if you're water-skiing at fifty miles an hour, you're not going to go beneath the surface. But if the boat stops – or even slows up – down you go in the deep water. And that's where the good ideas are.

In previous interviews you've often said that it's difficult to talk about certain ideas because they're 'too abstract'. What do you mean by that?
People want you to talk and I kinda understand that, but isn't everybody talking about pretty much the same thing? It's impossible to say how certain things happen. And then another problem is talking something to death. You start thinking about articulating a certain thing, and then you suddenly see it for what it is and the magic goes away a little bit. It's tricky. When you talk about things – unless you're a poet – a big thing becomes smaller.

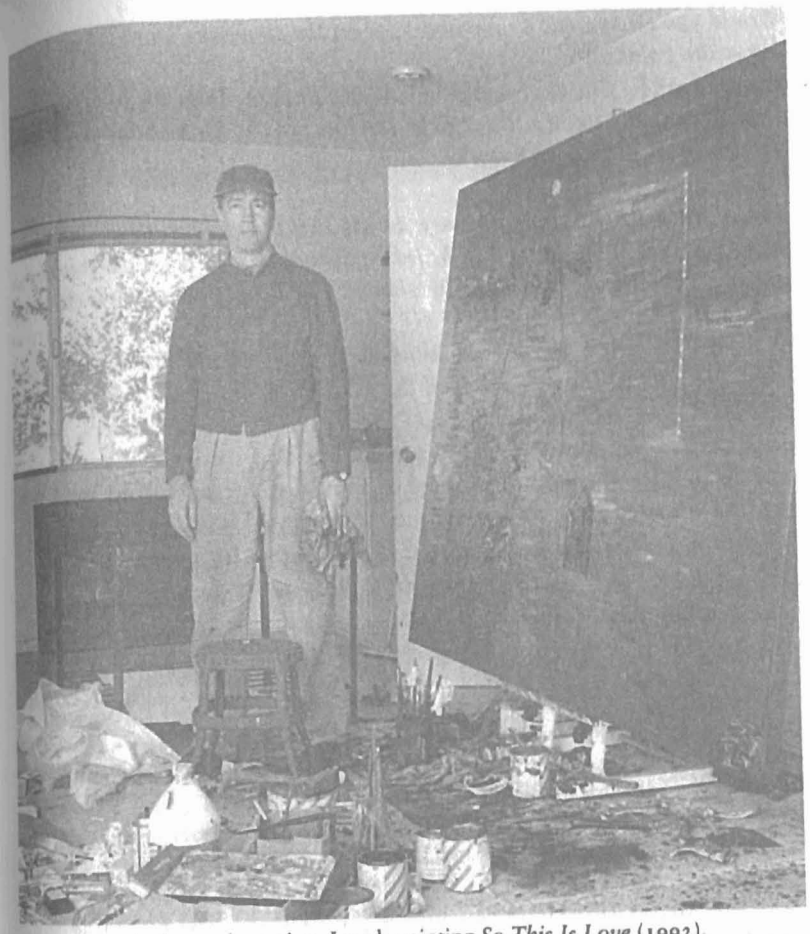
Or, like with critics, as soon as you say it, they say, 'Oh yeah, I knew that.' But it needed to be said to be *real*. And also it's so limiting to say

what something is. It becomes nothing more than that. And I like things that can be more than that. It's like an author who's dead: you read his book, he's not around to question, and you get tons of stuff out of the book – still. It doesn't matter what he thought. It could be interesting, but it really doesn't matter. What I would be able to tell you about my intentions in my films is irrelevant.

I can't think of two activities more different than painting and commercial film-making. With painting you're able to exercise ultimate control, within a defined space. And it's a solitary, as opposed to a group, activity.
They're different but there's many similarities. With the paint, I'm not really in control and there's action and reaction and give and take. When you get together with a crew of people that are going to do a film, at first they have *zero* idea. And then they read the script. And then they get closer. They'll bring a prop to you and you'll say, 'No, no, no, no, that's wrong because of this and this and this.' And they say, 'Oh!' And now they're closer still – and then they go away and they bring much better things and then you could almost say, 'Which one do you really think is the best one?' And you both pick the same one. They tune in. And one by one they're tuning into this thing. Again, it's not, you know, a perfect tune-in, but it gets much closer to one way to go. So then it doesn't matter how many people are around: you're all making the same movie and you get into a kind of an atmosphere where you're separated from the rest of the world and you're into this other world. And it's a beautiful thing.

Painting is often a very private activity compared to movie-making. Is it more personal to you? Do you make efforts to get it shown?
That's a really tricky thing because you learn pretty quick that a painting that's thrilling to you isn't necessarily so thrilling to others. And yet you have some sort of urge to show your work. Mostly it's a humiliating, disastrous, negative experience. And you kinda glom onto those who appreciate it, but you're always finding out they don't appreciate it quite as much as you want them to. And it's the same in film. If you go about it for money, or to try to make a commercial picture, say, then you just look at the box office and you can see how you did. But if it's for any other reason, it's pretty disturbing, you know, to put a work out.

As the name David Lynch is firmly established in cinema, does this put pressure on the painting/photographic work when you show it?
It does. And even worse than that is the 'Celebrity Painting' thing. It really



Action and reaction. Lynch painting *So This Is Love* (1992).

makes you puke. And it's a terrible thing. It's like Don Van Vliet [a.k.a. Captain Beefheart]: in order to make his painting more real, and to make it more legitimate, maybe, he felt he had to give up his music. Once you get known for one thing, it's really hard to jump-start the other thing and be taken seriously for it.

I could change my name! I thought about that, because names are weird things. When you say 'pus', you know, there's so many things that come along with that word. A very nice photo of a pile of pus – labelled 'Pus' – could be pretty cool. Once a name starts getting certain meanings attached to it, it can be good, or it can be, you know, really bad.

Would you like people to somehow forget the cinematic work when looking at the painting?

It's impossible. The first thing they do is compare. They see references or see this or that. And it's impossible. It's like not thinking about elephants, you know. It just doesn't work.

There are a lot of contemporary artists making movies now – Robert Longo, David Salle, Larry Clark, Julian Schnabel, etc. What do you think are the benefits of moving into cinema for people who are primarily painters?

Well, it's all about ideas. And some ideas are painting ideas, and some ideas are cinema ideas. And then the cool thing about cinema is that it embraces time and sound and, you know, stories and characters, and it goes on and on and on. And it can be like performance. What you're searching for is those magical combos of all the elements. And then you get 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts' kinda thing, and then it's worth the trip. I think cinema is like a magnet for people with ideas, and I don't see how they stay away from it for so long.

2

Garden in the City of Industry

From *The Bride* to *The Grandmother*

Educational institutions, established methods of learning, words and even individual letters are often associated with frustration, suspicion or fear in Lynch's work. By all accounts, he has never been a scholarly person, and when school grades became a concern, it was Bushnell Keeler who defended him on the basis of his all-too-obvious talent as a painter. Lynch's first wife, Peggy Reavey, believes that he was probably bored by a lot of what was being taught: 'He was a lousy high school student, but he was very popular. He's a good-looking guy and was part of the fraternity. He charmed his way through. He was not an outcast; that's never been his role.'

In 1964 Lynch started full-time art education at the Boston Museum School, but abandoned the course after a year in favour of a three-year trip to Europe with friend and fellow artist Jack Fisk (now a production designer and director). When the trip was aborted after only fifteen days, Lynch returned to Alexandria and to the home of Bushnell Keeler. Now financially cut off by his parents, Lynch had to earn his keep. This included helping to decorate the Keelers' house, as Toby remembers only too well: 'He started in this second-storey bathroom, and he used a paintbrush that had a one-inch head on it! A teeney little brush. He spent *three days* painting this bathroom, and probably a day alone painting the radiator! He got into every single nook and cranny and painted that thing probably better than when it was new. It took him *forever*. My mother still laughs when she thinks of David in that bathroom.'

It wasn't until 1965, when Lynch reached the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, that events began to change radically on all fronts. Philadelphia itself is a city that has exerted a lasting impact and influence on Lynch and his work. He also met Peggy Reavey, a fellow student at the Academy. They were married in 1967, and their daughter, Jennifer, was born in April of the following year. Much has since been made of Lynch the reluctant student father, who saw his dedication to the 'art life' now being compromised by the demands of family – a state of mind that would later find its distant echo in *Eraserhead*. But as Reavey says: 'He definitely was a reluctant father, but a very loving one. Hey, I was pregnant when we got married. We were both reluctant.'

Lynch's pictorial style also changed. When he arrived at the Academy he was making brightly coloured compositions, but the paintings suddenly began to exhibit all the symptoms of a more troubled imagination. Reavey remembers the moment: 'I don't know what prompted it, but he suddenly started doing very dark

things. Big, black canvases.' The first of these was called *The Bride*, which, in Reavey's opinion, was a breakthrough. 'I know this sounds awful, but it was of an abstracted figure of a bride aborting herself. It was not repulsive in any way. It was very haunting, disturbing and beautifully painted.' However, the most far-reaching development in Lynch's work at the Academy was yet to come – his transition from painting to animated film-making. This was to lead to his first short, *The Alphabet*, in which the very act of learning is viewed as a poisoning event.

Lynch's assertion that, later in life, he had to 'learn to talk' is not a Lynchian smokescreen but a fact. 'I was with David in his pre-verbal days,' says Reavey. 'He didn't talk the way a lot of artists do. He would make noises, open his arms wide and make a sound like the wind. *The Alphabet* was a way of expressing his frustration with the need to be verbal. This film talks about the hell of a person with a non-verbal nature.'

It's perhaps fitting that Lynch should subsequently focus so closely on language in his movies, as well as on the specific, often highly eccentric ways in which characters express themselves. He has frequently referred with great enthusiasm to the qualities of a particular actor's voice. His ear for the rhythms of speech, as with all sounds, is highly tuned: *The Grandmother*, his second short, reduced (or elevated) all dialogue to the status of pure sound effect. When one considers what Isabella Rossellini has also called his 'hatred' of words – on the basis that they are so 'imprecise' – it's clear that Lynch's relationship to language is not only complex, but unique in contemporary cinema. 'He's found a way to make words work for him,' concludes Reavey. 'He uses them non-verbally. He paints with them. They're textural, and have a sensory presence. He's very poetic.'

RODLEY: *When you first encountered art education what did you make of it?*
LYNCH: Every high school here had some kinda art course. Unfortunately – I'm sure it's the same the world over – there's the 'those who can, do; those who can't, teach' kinda thing. That's not really fair, but what you're exposed to is not so inspiring, and the things that you're asked to do are not inspiring, and more often than not, it restricts people. And pretty soon this thing in your brain that is free, and could evolve, gets clamped shut and you can't move any more. I knew that it was being hurt, but I didn't know how much it was being hurt.

Do you think that film-making could have been something you would have completely bypassed if things had been better in the early stages of your art education?
I don't know, because the switch-over to film was way more a product of fate than any kind of conscious decision-making. It was *weird*, you know, how it happened. I didn't have to do anything, I just had a kind of a

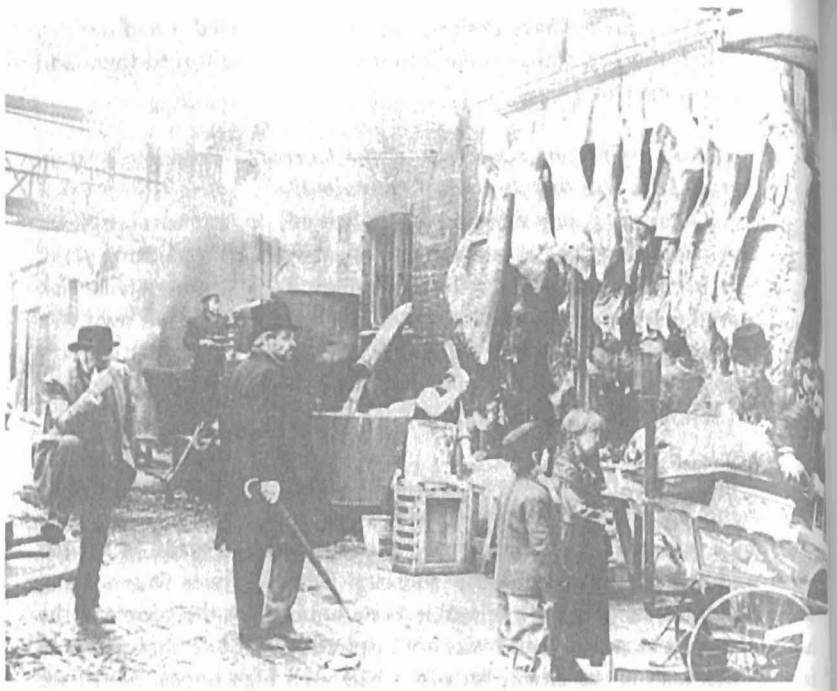
desire . . . Many people have desires, but they're thwarted. I had desires, and one after another, things came into my life that reinforced them and made them come true.

You first started your art education at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. Was that as a full-time student?
No. I first started going there in High School, to attend classes on Saturdays. I didn't go there as a student, I just went to a painting class. And then I rented a back-room studio through Toby's father. Jack Fisk and I shared that room, and then it got too small, and we got our own. We had three other studios before we graduated. Those were great studios, great places. And we did a lot of painting. And then I went to the Boston Museum School, after High School, for one year.

It was during that year that you left and went to study in Europe with your friend, Jack Fisk. What was wrong?
Well, Jack had gone to Cooper Union and not had that great an experience, and I'd gone to the Boston Museum School. There was nothing wrong with the school, but a school is like a house – it's the people in the house that can be a problem. I was not inspired AT ALL in that place. In fact, it was tearing me down, because I had such high hopes. So off we went to Europe. One of Toby's uncles fixed us up with a dirt-cheap ticket in exchange for being in charge of this group of girls. All we had to do was make sure this group of girls got on the plane. [Laughs.]

Who were the girls?
They were, like, rich girls. I sat next to a girl from Chicago, and her father owned movie theatres, of all things! And she was being sent off on this tour around Europe. In those days it was not that regular a thing to go to Europe. And Europe was much stranger. You could feel things in the air. And it felt like way more of the last century was manifest at that time. That was still there when I did *The Elephant Man*, but Freddie Francis told me that all the locations for *The Elephant Man* are pretty much gone now. We couldn't make the same film, or even close to it, on location in England now.

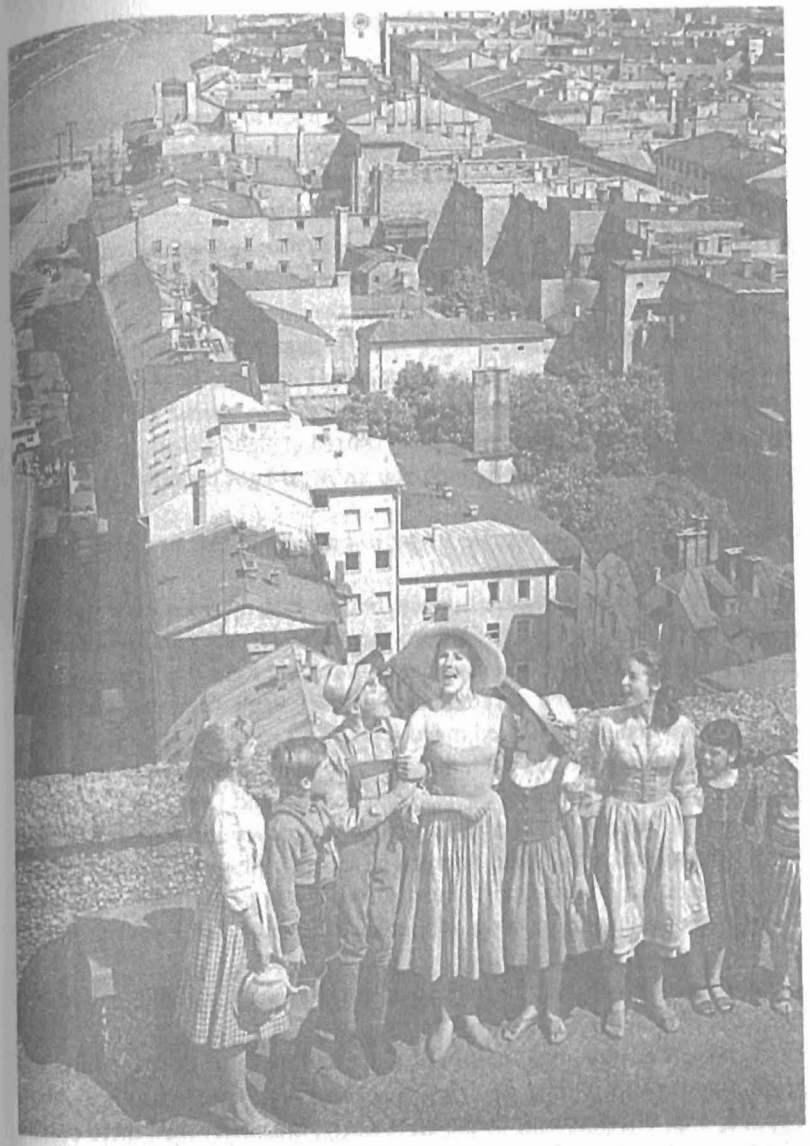
I understand that you went – at least in part – to study with the painter Oskar Kokoschka. Why that particular painter?
Well, Lyonel Feininger's son was one of the painting teachers at the Boston Museum School. And they had a tie-in with Kokoschka. It was set up that I could go with a letter of introduction to his school. And it's



Victorian London, Lynch style. Anthony Hopkins, flesh and industry in *The Elephant Man* (1980).

strange because at that time I wasn't too wild about his painting. But really, now, I see that he is the guy that I'm almost most wild about. So, it would have been great if it'd worked out.

A planned three-year trip to Europe ended after only fifteen days. Why? Well, I was nineteen and my thoughts weren't my own: they were other people's. Jack and I made our way over to Salzburg and I was carrying this portfolio. It weighed, like, fifty pounds. And I'd sent a trunk over with some of this house paint that I liked. It was almost like a gesso, except it was real cheap. It was like double-thick house paint. I didn't think I would be able to find it in Europe so I sent this trunk over there filled with this stuff. In Salzburg, *The Sound of Music* had just come out, and so we went to see that movie to picture where we were gonna go. And in reality it was, like, really *weird*. It was so unpainterly and so *clean* . . . It smelt good – there were pines there and I like the smell of pine – and this castle was there, but Kokoschka wasn't. So almost the second we got there a plug



The clean, fresh European dream. Julie Andrews and assembled troops in *The Sound of Music* (1965).

was pulled on the whole trip, and the rest was just a winding down.

At what point did you move to Philadelphia?
See, that was a kind of a low point. I came back to Virginia, because that was sort of the only place to go. My parents had moved to Walnut Creek, California, and so when I came back from Europe I had nowhere to go and I went down to stay at Toby Keeler's house. And I got cut off financially. I had a kind of a deal with my parents that as long as I was attending school, they would take care of the money. And so when I said, 'I'm not going to school', it just followed that the dough went.

So I got a job with Toby's uncle at an architectural firm where my job was doing blueprints. But the main problem I had was I couldn't wake up in the morning. I only liked to work at night. So then I got fired from several jobs for that reason. This place started at eight o'clock in the morning and I would get physically sick, you know, if I got up early. [Laughs.]

Sleeping a lot, or being unable to get out of bed in the morning, implies that you were pretty unhappy.
Oh, yeah. I sometimes slept sixteen hours! But then I'd stay up for a coupla days. So after I got fired from the architectural firm, I worked in a frame shop for this guy, Michaelangelo Aloca, till I got fired again. I did a stupid thing: I scratched a frame, and Michaelangelo fired me. But he felt sorry for me and so he rehired me as a janitor.

But Bushnell Keeler and my father and a couple of the painters in the area were all conspiring to make life miserable for me, and I never really got the full story till just recently. I used to be able to go over and have coffee with Bushnell and, you know, talk. But then he started telling me he was too busy and for me to get out, and stuff like this. And it was all to try to get me to go to art school and get it together. It's such a kind thing, but I was miserable.

What finally convinced you that you should go back to college – in this case, the Philadelphia Academy?
Well, Jack Fisk was going to school there and he came down, telling me what a cool place it was. And that was just what I needed to hear. So I applied, and, unbeknownst to me till recently, Bushnell called them on the phone and gave them the hard sell on me and said I had the stuff.

What made it different from the Boston Museum School is there were some serious painters in Boston, but not enough, and the atmosphere just wasn't right. In Philadelphia there were great and serious painters, and everybody was inspiring one another and it was a beautiful time there.

But why didn't everyone just sit you down and tell you straight about going back to college, instead of staging an elaborate trick?
It wouldn't have worked. At that age you're in a very rebellious frame of mind. And I think you've got to be tricked, you know, you've got to think of it yourself. It's got to seem to be your idea. And it worked.

You've made several references to the unoriginality of your thought as a child and as a teenager, and you also said once that you didn't start having original thoughts until you were twenty-one. Did that begin to happen when you got to Philadelphia?
Yeah, right about that time. My first original idea might have been on the bridge. It was a combination of fear and hope. Those two things were always battling. And especially going over that bridge. I kept saying, 'I'm not in Philadelphia . . . I'm not in Philadelphia . . . I'm in Philadelphia.' When I got a little bit more than halfway over the bridge, I was in Philadelphia. [Laughs.] I never wanted to go to Philadelphia; I always wanted to go to Boston. The word 'Boston' thrilled me. The word 'Philadelphia' was *not* that way.

What precisely happened to make you move from painting to your first film experiments?
It was one of my paintings. I don't remember which one, but it was an almost all-black painting. And it had a figure in it, and the figure was in the centre of the canvas. I remember *where* I was: I was in this fantastic room in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art building. It felt really good to be inside this building, and it just had great spaces. It had the smell, and it had good people in there too. This one room was huge and people had cordoned off little places to work. So there were other people in the room, and there's, like, music playing and, you know, you were left alone. You could come in day or night and work. So, I'm looking at this figure in the painting, and I hear a little wind, and see a little movement. And I had a wish that the painting would really be able to move, you know, some little bit. And that was it.

I remember talking to this guy, Bruce Samuelson. We were going to make an animated picture together. I was doing a lot of mechanical people and he was doing these real fleshy paintings. At one time I'd made a kind of electrical painting/sculpture in which you dropped a ball bearing which went down a ramp, setting off a whole series of contacts that first struck a match on a scraper to light a firecracker, then others opened a woman's mouth, lit up a red bulb and made her scream when the firecracker

exploded. I also did a series of 'mechanical women' – women who turned into typewriters, etc.

So Bruce and I were gonna do a mechanical/flesh kinda combo. That didn't pan out, but I got it in my head about this painting that moved. But I knew *zero* about film or photography. I thought a 16mm camera was a *type* of camera, and I was amazed at the different prices of them, as I called around. And so I took the cheapest one from this place called Photorama in Philadelphia. It wasn't really sleazy or anything, but it was just a camera store. It wasn't maybe the best one. I wouldn't want to say anything bad about it because they were great people.

They had this 16mm wind-up camera. I said: 'It's gotta be able to take single frames', so they said 'Yes', and so that's what I used. I asked them, 'How do you light the surface?' and they said, 'That's very simple. You take two photo floods, one on the right, one on the left, and aimed at a forty-five-degree angle on the stuff, it'll bounce back and go into the lens.' And I said, 'OK, great, now I gotta be able to keep this thing still.'

I was given this room in an old hotel that the Academy had bought. The first three floors were being used, but the rest had all these brass beds, great rugs and beautiful floor lamps in the halls. But the rooms were empty. So students could get hold of these rooms by taking this real quiet, strange elevator up, and go and work. So I got this dresser out of the hall and taped the camera to the top of the dresser so it wouldn't move. The camera didn't have reflex-viewing so I had to show the edges of the painting, and I got the radiator and the walls around it and part of a window or something in there too. I started animating this painting into a minute-long film. And in the same room I built a sculptured screen. I got Jack Fisk to cast me in plaster. We mounted three of me together and made this screen of it in plastic.

Then I had to build, like, an Erector-set rig on top of the projector so that it would take the finished film through the projector, way up to the ceiling and then back down, so the film would keep going continuously in a loop. And then I hung the sculptured screen and moved the projector back till just what I wanted was on the screen and the rest fell back far enough to disappear. It worked out really nice. It was a painting and sculpture show, but I had a film. People would turn the lights off for ten minutes out of the hour so that it could be seen. It was really a great thing, but it cost $200. And that to me seemed *so* expensive. I finally called it *Six Men Getting Sick*. I had a tape recorder going with a loop of a siren on it that just went continuously. It was the end-of-the-year show and I shared first prize with this great painter named Noel Mahaffey.

Did that first piece encourage you to do more, or was it too much of an economic shock?

The economic shock overpowered the thing. And as a painting it wasn't correct. But it did move, and so it was interesting to me. But then there was this other student, H. Barton Wasserman. He doesn't like me to call him a millionaire, but he had enough money to offer me $1,000 – which was like a *staggering* amount of money – to make a similar thing for him. He would buy a projector and mount it to the floor next to his chair and it would be bolted down, so he'd just click on the projector and have a screen that this thing would play on. And when the projector was off, the screen would be just like a piece of sculpture. And I said, *'Fantastic!'*

I was so high about this that I went back to Photorama and with $450 of the $1,000 I bought a used Bolex camera. A doctor had owned it and from what we saw, it looked like the doctor had never taken it out of its beautiful leather case. Lenses, a motor, a lot of little sideboard gadgets . . . You know, just a beautiful, beautiful camera. So I spent some time learning how to run it, and then started setting up this thing for Bart. I think I worked two months on it.

When I finished I took it down to the lab and gave it to them and then went the next day to collect it. When I got home I turned around in the door and spooled it out, because I wanted to hold it up to the sunlight to look at it. And, as I remember it, there weren't even any frame lines on the film! There was just a streaking blur! There was kind of an image there, but it was just pulled like toffee, you know, just *stretched*! I kept going through it, but it was *completely* no good. The camera had a broken take-up spool so the film was just moving through the gate freely, instead of frame by frame.

You'd think that a person who had this happen to them would be distraught. But I was almost kind of happy. I didn't know why. So I called up Bart and I said, 'Bart, the film is a disaster. The camera was broken and what I've done hasn't turned out.' And he said, 'Don't worry, David, take the rest of the money and make something else for me. Just give me a print.' End of story.

By then I'd started thinking about live action and animation combined. So I had this idea, and that's when I did *The Alphabet*. It was four minutes long. That's when my daughter Jennifer was born and I recorded her crying with a Uher tape recorder that was broken. I didn't know that it was broken, but the crying and everything I recorded with it was fantastic. And the frosting on the cake was that I loved the sounds that it made, primarily because the machine was broken. And the lab didn't make me

pay for it, because it was broken, so I had the best of both worlds.

That's how it came to be that I got to do *The Grandmother*. The reason I was happy, standing in the doorway that day, was because some part of me seemed to know that if I had made that film for Bart, that might have been the end of the road for me. But because I made *The Alphabet* instead, that was enough of a film to catch the attention of the American Film Institute when I submitted it to get a grant. Whereas the other one wouldn't have been. I just know it.

When you say you were happy that the film for Wasserman didn't work out, are you saying that you had a sixth sense about that piece?
That *could* be why I had that feeling. I wasn't thinking, 'The next thing is going to be much better, therefore this is good.' I just had a weird feeling that it didn't bother me.

Where did the idea for The Alphabet *come from?*
My wife Peggy's niece was having a bad dream one night and was saying the alphabet in her sleep in a tormented way. So that's sort of what started *The Alphabet* going. The rest of it was just subconscious.

In what sense do you mean 'subconscious'?
See, I never had to articulate anything. Painters don't have to talk. Every idea was in another language, down, deep inside. I never had to bring it to the surface. So things were pure and, you know, better that way. I didn't have to justify anything. I could let it just come out. And that's why talking about things isn't a totally satisfactory thing.

There's a clear sense in the film that learning is a very unpleasant experience.
It's a menacing thing. It's imposed upon you. It's necessary, but it's not pleasant. It just struck me that learning, instead of being something that's a happy process, is turned around to being almost like a nightmarish process, so it gives people dreams – bad dreams. So *The Alphabet* is a little nightmare about the fear connected with learning.

What was the thinking behind the use of white pan make-up for the little girl? Was it for maximum contrast with the vastness of the black?
Exactly. And also to step it away from just regular flesh. If you saw the regular flesh, your next impulse would be to do something with it. It would have been too real.

The film ends with a disturbing and violent image of the girl haemorrhaging bright red blood over her white bedsheets. Why is that?
Six Men Getting Sick wasn't really violent, but it was a little bit disturbing in its kind of simplistic way. You could interpret *The Alphabet* in different ways. Then we get into this thing about interpretations. I never really worried about it. This seemed a logical conclusion: that she was reacting to a kinda poison or something.

Already the sound seems to be playing an important role. Would you agree?
Yeah, but it was pretty primitive. Like I said, I recorded most of the effects on this tape recorder that was broken. I got my sound effects together and went into this lab called Calvin de Frenes. They had a sound stage, a sound department, and a camera department. I had learned a bunch of stuff from Photorama and then from Calvin. These people were fantastic to me. I'd go over there and I'd ask them questions and they'd give me the answers. And if they didn't know the answers, they'd bring someone down.

One of the guys that worked there was Herb Cardwell, who was the first cameraman on *Eraserhead*. He taught me about these three light techniques – like a key light, a little fill light and then a top light, or a back light. I hadn't used any principle on *The Alphabet*, but I did on *The Grandmother*.

Another guy, Bob Collum, *was* the sound department. When you see shots of equipment from the forties and fifties it's all that wrinkle paint, and the dials are black enamel – big dials, perfect meters, you know, real sparse and clean. And really *primitive*. That's the kind of room Bob had. It was like going weirdly back in time. When I came back to do the mix for *The Grandmother* there, I was supposed to work with Bob again. I'd gotten a bunch of stuff together and I told him I was getting ready to do the sound, and he met me at the door and he said, 'I have some bad news for you, David.' And I said, 'What's that?', and he said, 'I won't be able to work with you because we've gotten several jobs in since I last talked to you and I have to do them. But I've hired an assistant.'

So my heart is, like, *breaking*. And I'm going *nuts*. You know, I'm going to be slouched over to some jerk, and I'm just *dying*. And he said, 'In fact, I'd like you to meet him.' And so I look over and there's this guy, about six foot two, as thin as a string, with this kinda haircut that's, like, I don't know, it wasn't even military, it was just *goofball*! And he stands up and he's got a big smile on his face and he comes striding towards me. And Bob said, 'This is Alan Splet', and I shake his hand, and I swear I hear the

two bones in his forearm rattle together! And I'm kind of going nuts, you know. But anyway, that's how I met Al, and we've worked together ever since.

How did The Alphabet *lead you to getting a grant to make* The Grandmother?

Well, now I'm kinda getting hooked on film. So Bushnell Keeler steps in again. He tells me that his brother-in-law works for the National Endowment for the Arts, and there's a new thing called the American Film Institute and they give grants to film-makers. And he said, 'All you need to do is submit a script and previous work.' And, you know, I was kind of a goofball. It kind of went in one ear and out the other, and I didn't do anything right away. But finally I got the information and I wrote the script for *The Grandmother*.

Was that the first time you'd written a film idea down?

Yes. I don't know how many pages it was, but it wasn't like a regular script. It was like a *thing*. It was just little images and stuff, sort of like shorthand and poetry. I kept asking my friend, Charlie Williams, 'Is this an experimental film?' And he said, 'Yes, David, it is!', like I was some kinda, you know, dummy! But I submitted *The Alphabet* with it.

I'm living in Philadelphia and I'm married to Peggy and have a little baby, Jennifer. And I'm living in a *twelve-room house*! Three storeys, thirty-seven windows, but *big*. This place was a mansion. It had coal-burning fireplaces and a *huge* basement. Huge tall ceilings, staircases front and back. The master bedroom was twenty-five by twenty-five feet and the entire house cost me $3,500! The ENTIRE HOUSE! So you can imagine the type of neighbourhood that this house was in!

The area had a great mood – factories, smoke, railroads, diners, the strangest characters and the darkest nights. The people had stories etched in their faces, and I saw vivid images – plastic curtains held together with Band-Aids, rags stuffed in broken windows. A little girl pleading with her father to come home, and he's sitting on the kerb; guys ripping another guy out of a car while it's moving. All kinds of scenes.

We lived cheap, but the city was full of fear. A kid was shot to death down the street, and the chalk marks around where he'd lain stayed on the sidewalk for five days. We were robbed twice, had windows shot out and a car stolen. The house was first broken into only three days after we moved in, but I had a sword that Peggy's father had given me. I don't know what era this sword was from, but I kept it under the bed. And I

woke up to see Peggy's face about one inch from mine with a fear that I hope I never see on a person's face again. 'There's someone in the house!' I leapt up, put my underwear on backwards and grabbed this sword, and started screaming, 'Get the hell out of here!' I went to the head of the stairs with the sword raised and kept screaming. And these people who'd broken in were confused because the house had been vacant for so long, they were used to coming in. It dawned on them that someone was living there now and they left. There was no problem. The neighbours were awakened by it, but thought I was yelling at Peggy to get out!

I tell people that all that protected us from the outside were these bricks. But the bricks might as well have been paper. The feeling was so close to extreme danger, and the fear was so intense. There was violence and hate and filth. But the biggest influence in my whole life was that city. And it just happened at the perfect time. I saw things that were frightening, but more than that, *thrilling*.

You obviously found inspiration in such places, in terms of storytelling, but – in a painterly sense – what about the textures of industrial cities and landscapes?

If you set a new piece of steel out in a vacant lot, at first it doesn't have a lot going for it. It might be nice, but it's sort of a slow area. Then nature starts to work on it, and pretty soon it's a fantastic thing. It all started for me in Philadelphia because it's old enough, and it's got enough things in the air so that it can really go to work on itself. It's decaying, but it's fantastically beautiful. It gives you ideas. All the interaction of these chemicals and nature on things produces something that you could never get unless man and nature worked together.

Were you having to keep things afloat financially on your own, or was Peggy working as well?

No. It was tough. I had a job printing engravings and Peggy was taking care of Jennifer. That was the bleakest time. I had to print engravings all day long and then, you know, I was painting.

At what point did things take a change for the better?

I remember it was a dreary time of year. It was kinda cold and rainy and I'd sort of long since forgotten about the grant possibility. And then I got a thing in the mail about the first wave of grant winners which said that I would be considered for the second wave. But the first was Stan Brackhage and Bruce Conner – names that I was starting to hear about. They were all

older and had done so much. They were, like, *solid*, independent, avant-garde, cutting-edge film-makers, right? And I said, 'There's no fuckin' way! There's no *way*!'

So I just gave up thinking about it. I always said to Peggy when I left the house, 'Call me if anything exciting happens and I'll call you if anything exciting happens.' So we never called each other! Until one day she calls up. And I took this phone call that changed my life. George Stevens Junior and Tony Vellani – the head honchos at the American Film Institute – had me on the phone. They said that they wanted to give me this grant. And they said: 'You have a budget of $7,200 . . .' – no, $7,119 dollars, I think it was – and 'can you do it for $5,000?' Like I'm gonna say no! I said 'Yes!' And I'm now floating, you know, and, like, so *pressed* to the ceiling with happiness! Everyone should have that feeling! And the only way you really appreciate it is to be so *desperately* down.

Did you ever get a call that was like that again? Like, 'Here's forty-five million dollars to make Dune*'?*
No! Never. That was the one. It's not that things can't be topped, but it's just a different thing. I was really thinking that it could never happen. And then it happened. So it was just perfect.

Have you ever thought what might have happened if things hadn't changed for you at that point?
Maybe I would've tried to shoot *The Grandmother*, but it would've taken way longer, and the beautiful thing about that grant programme is that they put you into a place where you have a channel to put your work out. It put a solid foundation underneath each thing they did. If you're just a guy making a film in the basement, it's so hard to get it seen and get on to the next thing. But if you really love it, you're gonna do it. It's just sad when it's so much of a struggle.

As you'd now written your first script, did you refer to it much or did you then realize that scripts are no more than blueprints?
No, I never picked it up again. But because of the script I was forced to confront whether or not the story was there, or as much of it as I wanted. So I think scripts are really good. But if they were perfect you'd just release your script! You could just read it. And it's not that way. [Laughs.]

This is the first film featuring several characters. How did you go about casting it?

My printing partner at work was Dorothy McGinnis. I got her for the grandmother. And from art school, Bob Chadwick and Virginia Maitland, who were living together. And this little kid in the neighbourhood, Richard White. It's not that I'd seen him and had kinda written the thing for him, but somewhere along the line I discovered this kid and he was set early on. So it was cast from my immediate surroundings.

I was just sort of, you know, on my own. Peggy helped me a lot. She was my right-hand man. And I used all the short ends shooting my daughter Jennifer crawling around in this black room. But the day I painted the third floor black, a kid was shot dead in front of the house. As bad as LA is getting now, I still don't experience that kind of fear that I had in Philadelphia. It was too close and I was too vulnerable all the time.

The Grandmother *is much more ambitious in terms of film grammar than* The Alphabet. *It's not only like a painting, or comprised of static shots. With no formal film school training, how difficult did that feel to achieve?*
It just happened. I think it comes from common sense. You want someone to go from here to there, and you see a logical way to do it. And when you see the dailies, you learn so fast. I don't know if I reshot much, but on *Eraserhead* we reshot a lot of things. We'd learn. The first time would be a dry run, thinking it was going to be perfect. Then you just learn something brand new and go back and get it.

The sound is now becoming very dense and inventive. And music starts to play an important atmospheric role.
My friend Ronnie Culbertson had this group called Tractor, so I got him to do some music for the film and then Alan Splet and I did all the rest. When I met Alan, the plan was to get some sound effects from the company. Well, first of all their sound effects were terrible, and they were all on records. And so you had this scratching and popping stuff. Alan said, 'Look, I don't have a clue where you're coming from, and Bob has told me about you, and I know you're very serious about these things but I gotta figure out what you want. So let's listen to these sound effects records and if there's *anything* that you like . . .' And we listened to, you know, maybe every record. And then Alan said, 'Well, it looks like what we're going to have to do is record our own effects', and I said, 'Yeah, we're going to have to do that.' So for *sixty-three days* we made effects.

We were like Ike and Mike! I was there all day long! And we were, like, all over the building, recording. They didn't have a reverb unit and I wanted these whistles to reverberate, so I would go to one end of this great

big air-conditioning duct, and Al would be at the other end, recording my whistles! Just to get the reverb from the duct. We'd do all the tricks and stuff we could, with this primitive equipment they had. But we bent that stuff and used it to the maximum and then created four very, very, very dense tracks of effects. I remember the night Alan said, 'Let's just open all the pots and let this thing run and just, you know, dig it.' After all this work, we hadn't heard anything together. And we opened this thing up and that's the best I've ever heard it. Just full open, everything. It was *really, really* something. And we were so thrilled. Alan was a wizard.

So you completely tied up Alan Splet.
I tied him up, and Calvin de Frenes were paying his salary. So Bob Collum came to me. And Al's sitting there, but he's being quiet because he works for Bob, even though they were best friends. And Bob said to me, 'David, here's the deal. We haven't said anything to you, and you and Al have been all over the building, and we like you very much, and we respect you, and we want to do everything we can. *However*, there are two possibilities facing us. One is an hourly rate. And the other is a per reel sound effects charge. Now,' he says, 'I'm going to go to the front office and there's a difference between the two of several thousand dollars.' Bob convinced them to give me the per reel rate. The minimum.

My original budget was $7,200, and Tony Vellani came up from Washington on a train and saw the almost-completed film, and at his urging AFI gave me another $2,200, so my budget was spot-on to finish the film. But had they charged me the per hour rate, it would have been *impossible*. We logged so many hours on that picture it wasn't *funny*!

Very few directors seem to place as much importance on sound as you do, even though it comprises half of the experience – maybe more, in some cases. You really have always been the sound designer of your movies.
Exactly. But directors very rarely meet and talk with other directors. You just don't know what other people do. I know there's a dialogue between the director and the sound designer. There has to be. But how much of a dialogue and how much do you go into that with them? The same way with the music, the same way with the photography. Same way with every part of it. They can be the greatest, but if they don't tune in to what the film needs, then it's going to be a hotch-potch of great stuff that doesn't come together. So, it seems to me that the whole thing is to get people on the same track and just keep going and going so that everything that comes through is fitting into this world. Al and I had this way of working

together. There are no rules. You can feel when it's right.

There's a very particular point in The Grandmother *where the boy is being held over the urine stain on his bedsheets and there's this sound which is like a tethered bird. It's impossible to imagine any other sound for that image. It seems so right.*
Well, if you were recording real sound, that would be one thing. But that's just a point of departure to find the next level of sounds that build up the intensity of that experience for this kid. So it's finding those sounds that fit, and yet don't fit. They're just off, but they amplify the emotion, or amplify the feeling. I remember that one of those sounds – tearing the sheets back – was actually a golf-swing backwards.

Colour is still mostly banished from that movie. Faces are again white, and the rooms are completely black. And yet what little is there – the reds, in particular – are very strong. Why is that?
Well, a weird thing happened. I'd made the faces up white, but the lab didn't know. So they were pushing the colour to try to get more out of the flesh tones. Because this is like a Republican lab or something. And so they were trying to make it normal! They're pumping the red to the *max*. So any place that any pink should ooze out of that white, it was *really* pink. And a mouth was as red as could be. And I liked that look. But I didn't want to say anything. And, sure enough, they always tried to get the flesh, and so it always looked the same. That's how come it looks so red.

The last image is a little unclear to me. What's happening to the boy?
He's just back in . . . trying to dream. Trying to dream a way . . . That was kind of a failure. What it was is: he's there at the end with the pod, but I'd already destroyed the pods I had used. I should have made another and then put it on his head. But I ended up animating it. I like the little branches coming in at the sides, but I painted the pod myself and, obviously, it's too flat.

There's much less animation in The Grandmother. *I wonder if that was because you'd now begun to be more interested in live action – even though some of it is stop-frame motion?*
I guess that's right. And also again, the story *said* to me, you know, it should be this way. But it wasn't a kind of conscious thing. It was just: this is right for here, or this is what I'm gonna do *here*, and this is how it goes *here*.

In The Grandmother *you're already playing with the way people move. The parents, for instance, move occasionally in very threatening or eccentric ways. What is that about?*
I don't know, Chris. It's . . . um . . . sort of the little boy's world. It was his take on it. And I think parents, you know, have to move in certain ways. They don't move completely normally sometimes. They do this thing and you're unable to understand what they're doing. Something's funny, you know. You can't get a grasp on it, figure it out and deal with it.

Both shorts – although shot in colour – are still mostly black.
Yeah. To film *The Alphabet* and *The Grandmother* I painted the inside of my house black. I think of it as some sort of thing about a proportion – a certain amount of black will allow you to do a little bit of colour. There could be even a mathematical equation for that. So that's what I was trying to do. For *The Grandmother* I chalk-outlined some areas so that they would show up for corners, where the ceiling meets the walls and stuff like that – around the doors. I like colour, it's just that if it gets too busy, it holds you on the surface, and that's what I don't like. Some stories you want to do in colour, like *Blue Velvet*. I didn't even *think* about black and white for that.

The parents are very, very unpleasant. Did your own parents ever see the film?
Oh yeah, they saw it.

Did they wonder, 'Is this how David saw us?'
Although we've never really talked about it, I'm sure they've often wondered where this stuff comes from. You know, 'Poor David.' Because it's very foreign to my actual upbringing. But the whole thing is that we get an awful lotta stuff outside the home. Ideas are the strangest things, because they suddenly enter into your conscious mind and you don't know really where they come from – where they existed before they were introduced to you. They could mean something, or they could just be there for you to work with. I don't know.

Toby Keeler once said to me that you were an ideas man. Is he right?
Ideas are the best thing going. Somewhere there's all the ideas, and they're sitting there and once in a while one will bob up and the idea is made known suddenly. Something is seen and known and felt all at once, and along with it comes a burst of enthusiasm and you fall in love with it. It's

unbelievable that you could get ideas and that someone could give you money to make a film from them.

And you've gotta be true to them because they're bigger than you first think they are. They're almost like gifts, and even if you don't understand them a hundred per cent, if you're true to them, they'll ring true at different levels. But if you alter them too much they won't even ring; they'll just sort of clank. I really believe it's like The Beach Boys said: 'Be true to your school.' Later on someone might tell you, 'That's a very uncommercial idea', or 'That's going to make a hundred million dollars.' But if you're thinking about that up front, for me you're thinking about the wrong things.

The tree, dirt and organic matter in the boy's bedroom in The Grandmother *appear later as a part of the world inside Henry's radiator in* Eraserhead. *And in* Twin Peaks *a little pile of dirt – almost like an altar – marks the spot where Laura Palmer is murdered. What is that all about?*
I have no idea. A real simple explanation could be something about my father and the forest. But then, there must be other people who have parents who do gardening, and they don't have anything in their work like that. I don't know.

I like mounds of dirt – I *really* like mounds of dirt. When we were doing *Eraserhead*, Peggy and I lived with Jennifer in a single house in LA that was in a neat area but the house was pretty cheap. And it had a circular, wooden dining table. On her birthday, Peggy went out for some reason, and Jennifer and I started carrying in buckets of dirt. And we made a pile of dirt about four feet high on the dining room table, covered the whole thing in just a mountain of dirt, and then dug little tunnels into it and put little clay abstract sculptures in the front of the tunnels. And Peggy, bless her heart, was over the moon about it when she came home. So we left it there for months. And it ate the surface of the wood, you know, on the table, because it started going to work organically. So the veneer was pretty much toasted when we finally took it off. It was a neat sculpture.

Where that comes from, I don't know. Mounds of dirt have shown up from time to time in my pictures, but I don't really question it. It's just a repeating theme and every time I almost feel like I've discovered it anew. I don't remember doing it in the past. Someone will say, 'Hey! Didn't you put ten mounds of dirt in before?' Oh! And then I say, 'I don't know now whether I'll do it again.' You start questioning. It's hard to figure.

Does the character of the Grandmother have any echoes in your own life?

Henry (Jack Nance) and a drawer full of dirt in *Eraserhead* (1976).

In the film she's like a saviour.
Yeah. There's something about a grandmother. I had two great – not *Great* – they were *fantastic* grandmothers! And two fantastic grandfathers. And they were close to each other. But the film didn't come from that, I'm sure it didn't. It came from this particular character's need – a need that that prototype can provide. Grandmothers get playful. And they relax a little, and they have unconditional love. And that's what this kid, you know, conjured up.

Why does she have to die?
Well, there's a reason for that. It got putrefied through some wrong thinking. It got putrefied . . .

Was H. Barton Wasserman still following what you were doing?
No. There was quite a long period of time between *The Alphabet* and *The Grandmother*. And during that time, since I gave Bart a copy of *The Alphabet* for himself, that kind of finished up my deal with him. And my father also gave me some money to finish *The Alphabet* because I ran out of money again.

One of the obvious differences between the two films, apart from the technical advances, is the introduction of a narrative. Did you decide you wanted to start telling stories?
Yeah. The ideas started stringing together. I wasn't thinking about a story really. And the way they came about was, suddenly, there was a bit of a beginning, middle and end. And it surprised me, sort of. But there it was. But I didn't set out to do it. And how it came about I can't even remember. I don't know why I thought that story up.

That was the first time I ever submitted something, and someone was going to read it, and judge it, and decide whether they were going to pay for it. And you realize that, in Hollywood, a person writes a script and then they give it over to somebody and a certain process starts happening where the person that you give it to wants to understand it. And so a lot of stories get clarified *to death*. And now there's, like, ten people reading this thing. And they all need to understand it. And by the time all of them understand it, there's no abstractions left, it's not what the person originally wanted, there's fifty million compromises *already* on this thing. And not one of the ten, maybe, is happy. Certainly the person that wrote it's not happy. It's already in trouble. It's not good.

When you write a book, there's maybe your editor or somebody reading it, but it's way more pure, and many more things can be explored. Chances can be taken, and things don't have to be explained. As soon as they get the drift, they say, 'Yes, I felt that' and 'Don't worry, that's beautifully abstract' or whatever.

But at this point, you're already drifting towards that industry.
Yeah, but not in my mind. I'm not consciously drifting towards any industry, and I know that the only reason I came to LA was because the American Film Institute had its Centre here. And that came about because Tony Vellani came up to Philadelphia and saw *The Grandmother*. He said two things: 'I'm going back to talk to George Stevens, and I'm going to get you money to finish this.' And then he said, 'You've got to go out to the Centre in LA and I'm going to try to make that happen.' He also said that he wanted Alan Splet to head the sound department.

So that was a good trip.
That was a very good trip. It was an excellent trip.

More euphoria.
More euphoria. And then I sweated blood for a while, thinking I wouldn't

get in, and Tony was just pulling my chain. And, lo and behold! I got in. Tony gave me this catalogue for the first year, and I remember this one photo that I latched on to. It was a photo of the 'fellows', in a room, and there was a fire in the fireplace. I'm not positive about this, but some of them had sweaters on. And I thought to myself that in California people wear sweaters! So it must sometimes be cool at night or something, because it was kind of a night-time thing, I imagined. And I thought, 'What a great climate, that it's warm in the day, and cool in the night – cool enough to wear a sweater!' Something about that just got me 'where I live'. So we all came out to California. Alan Splet had left a month earlier.

Al was legally blind. I mean, he could see, but he couldn't drive. And he had a Packard car for a while in Philadelphia, but his friend Bob would drive it, and Al would just ride in it. He would love to have Bob drive with the left wheels on the road and the right wheels on the rough side of the road. And this Packard was a massive car. And it had shock-absorbers that they used on heavy trucks. But they were so sophisticated. He'd just like to feel those shock-absorbers smoothing out the road, no matter how bumpy it was!

Al died this last year. He had cancer. He had fought it for three years, bless his heart. I loved Alan, you know, he was one of my best friends. It was just fun working on sounds with Al, because he was so enthusiastic – such a gifted, hard-working friend.

You said once that where a person lives tends to affect them. Los Angeles is a very particular, peculiar environment. What is it about this city that appeals to you?

Number one, the intense light. Also the different feelings in the air. But like every place it's always changing. And it takes longer to appreciate LA than a lot of cities, because it's so spread out, and every area has its own mood. What I really like about it is, from time to time, if you drive around – especially at night – you can get a little gust of wind of the great days of the silver screen. All there in, like, living memory. It just makes you *wish* that you'd lived in those times. I think that if you could go back, that's the one place that you want to go back to. Maybe they didn't appreciate it at the time, but it was an incredible place to be at the beginning of cinema. Till it kind of went funny in the fifties probably, or the sixties.

If you had always associated cities with fear, weren't you scared of Los Angeles? It can be a very frightening city.

Well, like I said, it's a city with so much light. Of course, LA's gotten more frightening, but when I first came here from Philadelphia, I felt the evaporation of fear – fear of just going out. It's very surprising to look back and realize how much pressure I was living under in Philadelphia. So LA was like a dream. I remember that gasoline was twenty-three to twenty-five cents a gallon. I had a Volkswagen, and I'd fill it up for three bucks. The sun was warm, beating down on my back, the Volkswagen was filled with gas, and I could afford it. I could go to the store and get all my stuff. I had it made. On *nothing*, you know? I was able to have all the things that people had. And then something went really wildly wrong. Gas went up, everything went up and now it's *really* hard. If you live in certain areas, just getting around and getting food is a big problem. But there was a little golden time when it was really OK.

If by 1970 you'd decided you wanted to make movies, do you think it was inevitable that you would end up here?

No. You can make films any place. And I'm not connected with any studio. And especially with all this strange communication, you can live out in the woods and talk to your agent and do a lot of business on the computer. That's really important. To be in a place that *feels* good to you. This isn't my home, but I've been here longer than I've been any other place. And I really like feeling the past that's been here. Some sort of dream, movie past.

You'd moved here before even starting Eraserhead*?*

Yeah, I was here in 1970 and I didn't start shooting *Eraserhead* till June of '72, although I started preparing for it in '71.

3

I See Myself

Eraserhead

Like an unannounced visitor from a distant planet, *Eraserhead* began its slow invasion in 1976. Wrong-footing critics and captivating its first alien allies – the midnight movie crowd – it was an indelible experience. Typical of the slightly bewildered response by critics was an early British review which, while acknowledging *Eraserhead*'s extraordinary originality, struggled to access the exact nature of its remarkable inner life. Attempting an accurate or meaningful synopsis proved difficult. Downing blunt critical tools, the review concluded that *Eraserhead* was a movie 'to be experienced rather than explained'.

For Lynch this is the perfect response because, perversely, it corresponds most closely to his own. His refusal to interrogate the images, sounds and ideas that make themselves known to him – often during the actual process of shooting – accounts not only for their uniqueness, but also for his occasional inability to articulate their precise meaning. His desire is to 'speak directly' through the films, combined with a faith in the audience's own eyes and ears, produces their strange, sensory power.

Even when Lynch seems aware of the precise, personal meaning of certain sequences, he often responds with a 'don't know/won't tell' combo: this is nowhere more apparent than with *Eraserhead,* arguably his most deeply personal and mysterious film. Lynch is unwilling to assign specific words to images or sequences in his movies simply for the purpose of explanation or justification. He clearly believes this to be an irrelevant and unnecessary part of the creative process. Or worse, merely reductive. This is something that those close to him have learnt to accept. As Toby Keeler observes, 'I once said: "What was *Wild at Heart* about David?" and he said, "Well, it's about one hour and forty-five minutes."' Or, as Peggy Reavey believes, 'If he could tell you what his movies are about, they wouldn't be about that!'

Lynch's refusal either to confirm any specific readings of *Eraserhead,* or to confess his own thinking behind the many abstractions in the film, extends beyond the issue of interpretation to production detail, most notably on the workings of the 'baby'. This is a closely guarded secret, known perhaps only to the small, highly dedicated crew that worked on the film. Lynch has issued the occasional statement ('it was born nearby'; 'maybe it was found'). Initially, these merely sound like Lynch playfully maintaining the mystery of the film. They could also suggest that Henry Spencer's world is still so real to Lynch that any other explanation is simply unthinkable.

Eraserhead's core crew comprised cameraman Herbert Cardwell (later to be replaced by Frederick Elmes), soundman Alan Splet, Catherine Coulson (in a multitude of roles), production manager/props person Doreen Small and actor Jack Nance. Lynch's attachment to the film is part of an obvious affection for the people, the times, and for a particular *way* of making cinema – the slow way. All the more reason, perhaps, to preserve its essential mysteries.

For its protracted production schedule alone, the film brings renewed meaning to the phrase 'labour of love'. Five years in the making, *Eraserhead* is one of the most striking examples of a director's sheer determination, against considerable odds, to bring a vision to the screen. To have achieved such a flawlessly hermetic world, over several years and on such a low budget, is remarkable.

'He's always been an incredible worker,' says Peggy Reavey. 'He was so dedicated, it could be pretty exhausting.' Her experiences of working with Lynch on the shorts meant that the *Eraserhead* experience came as no great surprise. She recalls one particular night, during hard times in Philadelphia, when Lynch needed a shower head, a curtain and some very particular nuts and bolts for a shot. It was already 2 a.m.: 'It was trash night, so he went out and picked through all the trash cans in this little alley and came back with every single thing he needed. I was depressed, because it meant we had to go back to work! He is incredibly resourceful and determined, and has this amazing creative energy to pull things together so that they work. He always had the sense that things were possible. It was so wonderful to watch him work with such limited resources.'

However, it was the marriage that was to fail *Eraserhead*'s extended labour. 'It's a lot of work being with David Lynch,' admits Reavey. 'He has a full-time staff now. Our friendship continued. I just quit the job.' But the experience survives as a cherished memory. Reavey recalls an early *Eraserhead* Christmas, when Lynch was doing his paper route: 'David was hoping to get some extra money from the people he was delivering newspapers to. So I went to "Pick and Save" to get some Christmas cards so he could self-address them in the hope that they would send him some extra cash. I don't think anyone did. It was pretty tough,' she concludes, 'and a wonderful contrast when you think of David's life now. It always seemed that it had to happen for David because he had the ability to go out and pick through the trash cans and find everything he needed.'

RODLEY: Eraserhead *took five years to complete. You must have been completely dedicated to the film to sustain both the project and your own enthusiasm over such an extended production period. What was it about the idea that you loved?*

LYNCH: It was the world. In my mind it was a world between a factory and a factory neighbourhood. A little, unknown, twisted, almost silent lost spot where little details and little torments existed. And people were struggling

in darkness. They're living in those fringelands, and they're the people I really love. Henry's definitely one of those people. They kind of get lost in time. They're either working in a factory or fiddling with something or other. It's a world that's neither here nor there. It came out of the air in Philadelphia. I always say it's my *Philadelphia Story*. It just doesn't have Jimmy Stewart in it!

I could be on the set at night and I would imagine the whole world around it. I imagined walking out, and there were very few cars – there might be one far away, but in the shadows – and very few people. And the lights in the windows would be really dim, and there would be no movement in the window, and the coffee shop would be empty except for one person who didn't speak properly. It was just like a *mood*. The life in that world . . . there was nothing like it. Things go so fast when you're making a movie now that you're not able to give the world enough – what it deserves. It wants to be lived in a little bit, it's got so much to offer and you're going just a little too fast. It's just sad.

When he reviewed Blue Velvet, *novelist J.G. Ballard said that the film was 'like* The Wizard of Oz *reshot with a script by Franz Kafka and decor by Francis Bacon'. Kafka certainly comes to mind in* Eraserhead. *Do you like his work?*

Yeah. The one artist that I feel could be my brother – and I almost don't like saying it because the reaction is always, 'Yeah, you and everybody else' – is Franz Kafka. I really dig him a lot. Some of his things are the most thrilling combos of words I have ever read. If Kafka wrote a crime picture, I'd be there. I'd like to direct that for sure.

In a way, Henry is akin to Joseph K in Kafka's The Trial *– a man at turns bemused and alarmed by what is happening to him.*

Henry is very sure that something is happening, but he doesn't understand it at all. He watches things very, very carefully, because he's trying to figure them out. He might study the corner of that pie container, just because it's in his line of sight, and he might wonder why he sat where he did to have that be there like that. Everything is new. It might not be frightening to him, but it could be a key to something. Everything should be looked at. There could be clues in it.

There seems to be little differentiation between the outside and the inside in Eraserhead *– something that becomes much more pronounced later in* Twin Peaks. *Views through windows are of brick walls, and although the*

Looking for clues. Kafka's Joseph K (Anthony Perkins) in Orson Welles's *Le Procès* (*The Trial*, 1962).

sounds might be different, it's mostly just as noisy inside Henry's apartment block as it is in the world outside. The feeling is of no letting up, there's a constant . . .

Pressure. Well, again, it's industry and different things going on – a lot of it unseen, but heard. But to me, even though there was plenty of ambiguous torment in Henry, his apartment – actually, his room – was, you know, fairly cosy. It was just this one little place he had to mull things over. The anxiety doesn't let up, but it doesn't really let up for anybody. Pressure is, you know, always building. In a way, I'd like to live in Henry's apartment, and be around there. I love Hitchcock's *Rear Window* because it has such a mood, and even though I know what's going to happen I love being in that room and feeling that time. It's like I can smell it.

How did Eraserhead *come about?*

Well, fate stepped in again and was really smiling on me. The Centre was completely chaotic and disorganized, which was great. And you quickly learned that if you were going to get something done, you would have to

do it yourself. They wanted to let people do their thing. If you could get it going, they would support it. They didn't have any kind of real programme. They ran films all day long and you could look at them. And if there was something you wanted to see, or something somebody said you'd gotta see, you'd go up and there it would be. It was an unbelievable screening room. Anything that was on film, they could show there. And people would get a hold of really rare prints. The chandelier would drift up into the ceiling and dim as it went. And they had the *greatest* projectionists!

My first year at the Centre was spent rewriting a forty-five-page script I wrote called *Gardenback*. The whole thing unfolded from this painting I'd done. The script had a story, in my mind, and it had what some people could call a 'monster' in it. When you look at a girl, something crosses from her to you. And in this story, that something is an insect.

Well, a couple of things happened. Caleb Deschanel read this script and he called me up and said he loved it. He was a fellow at the Centre and a director of photography. He said he wanted to shoot it. And that was really great with me. I'd worked with Caleb on a film he was shooting for a guy named Gil Dennis. They wanted a snake to crawl between the wall and the wallpaper in this thing, so I built this snake and this rig and did this thing for Gil. It didn't work out real well, but it was OK. So Caleb was telling me about this producer over at Fox who was ready to do a series of low-budget horror films. This guy was a sort of a friend of his and he wanted my permission to show him *Gardenback*.

Frank Daniel – who was the Dean of the Czechoslovakian Film School – was by far the best teacher I ever had. Just a *great, great* teacher. *Unbelievable!* I never really liked teachers, but I liked Frank because he wasn't a teacher, in a way. He just talked. And he loved cinema, and he knew everything about it. Frank was always trying to talk to me about *Gardenback*, but I wasn't, you know, talking. So one day Caleb and Frank and I went to see this guy at Fox. And this guy said, 'Look, I want to give you $50,000 to make this movie. Caleb will shoot it, and it'll be a labour of love – you'll get everybody in there to do stuff for nothing.' But he said, 'It's only forty-five pages. You gotta make it 115 or 110 pages – it's gotta be a feature script.' And this, like, hurt my head! 'What does he mean?'

So Frank tried to explain to me. He said things like, 'You have to have these scenes between the people. And they have to talk. You should think about some dialogue.' And I still didn't know what he was really on about. 'What are they gonna say?' I said. And so [laughs] we started

having these weekly meetings which were like an experiment, because I really didn't know what they were getting at. And I was curious to see what they were going to say to me. Eventually a script got written. Gil Dennis was a writer and would come into the meetings. And Tony Vellani would sit in on these meetings too. So they would all talk to me and I'd go home and try to write these things.

What I wrote was pretty much worthless, but something happened inside me about structure, about scenes. And I don't even know what it was, but it sort of percolated down and became part of me. But the script was pretty much worthless. I knew I'd just watered it down. It was way more normal to me. The bits I liked were there, but they were interspersed with all this other stuff. And now it was the end of the first year, and there I was with this thing.

On the first day of the second year, the old fellows came in and met the new fellows. And at the end of this meeting, they assigned different groups to different places to kick off the new year. And I was assigned to a first-year group. In my mind, this was a humiliating thing, and I didn't understand it. So I got *really, really* upset. All this frustration came out and I stormed up to Frank Daniel and I screamed at him. I just barged in and told him, 'I'm outa here. I quit.' I went and told Alan. I said, 'I'm outa here!' He says, 'I'm going with you,' because he was fed up too, and we both stormed out of the place. We went down to Hamburger Hamlet and just sat there drinking coffee. It was over.

I finally went home and Peggy said, 'What the hell's going on? They've been calling every ten minutes!' And I said, 'I quit.' And she said, 'Well, they want to see you.' So I calmed down, and the next day I went up, just basically to hear what they had to say. And Frank said, 'We must be doing something wrong, because you're one of our favourite people, and you're upset. What do you want to do?' And I said, 'Well, I sure don't wanna do this piece a shit *Gardenback* now – it's wrecked!' And he said, 'What do you want to do?' And I said, 'I want to do *Eraserhead*.' And he said, 'OK, do *Eraserhead* then.'

So you already had the idea ready to go?

I had this twenty-one-page script. And they said, 'It's twenty-one pages,' and Tony or somebody said, 'It's a twenty-one-minute film.' And I said, 'Well . . . er . . . I think it's going to be longer than that.' So they elected it to be a forty-two-minute film. But the beautiful thing – because they were now feeling a little bit guilty – was that I was able to go to the equipment shed. My friend David Khasky was in charge of all the cameras and cables,

lights, everything. And I had this Volkswagen with a four-by-eight wooden rack that held tons of stuff. Well, it was packed four or five feet tall with cables and lights. And the car was packed with camera equipment. And I'd drive down to these stables owned by the school, unload and drive back up and get more.

The stables were down at the bottom of the mansion down Doheny Road. It was a little mansion in and of itself. It had a greenhouse, and a garden shed, all made of brick, with these shingle roofs. But it was all getting old and funny. It had garages, and a hay loft, a big L-shaped room above the garages. It had a maids' quarters, and places above for different people who worked for Doheny, kitchens, bathrooms, like a little hotel, with a lot of other stuff around. And I got four or five rooms and the hay loft and a couple of garages.

You just laid claim to them?
Yeah. No one wanted them anyway. They were empty. So we had a camera room, a green room, an editing room, rooms for sets, a food room and a bathroom. We just sort of had the run of the place. I had those stables for many years.

They knew you were there but they just left you alone?
Yes. They didn't know I was living there – I got divorced in my second year and I started living there. I also stayed at Jack Nance's and Catherine Coulson's house sometimes. And Al stayed at the stables a lot. That's another thing I had: since Al was head of the sound department, I had access to the entire mixing room, the Nagras, microphones and cables and all the rest. And the sound man. I had everything going for me. I was doing the thing I wanted to do most of all, making films. And I practically had my own little studio.

Did you get a grant to go to the Centre, or did your parents have to pay?
You have to get there and you have to take care of yourself. My father lent me money – me and Peggy and Jennifer – and Peggy's parents helped out too.

So how were you taking care of yourself during that time?
I can't remember what year it was in *Eraserhead*, but I got this paper route and I delivered the *Wall Street Journal*. That's how I supported myself. We only shot at night, and my route was at night. So at a certain point, I'd have to stop the shoot and go do the route. But I had the route

'Ike and Mike' play the stables. Alan R. Splet (on cello) and Lynch (on trumpet) at *Eraserhead* headquarters.

down so fast that I was only gone about an hour and eight minutes. Sometimes it would be fifty-nine minutes, but I was going *flat out* to make the hour.

Why were you only shooting at night?
Well, you know, because it was dark! And the park department was up there during the day, so it was noisy and there were people around. At night no one was there. And it was a night-time film. The mood was perfect, and that is critical.

Did you now regard yourself primarily as a film-maker?
I didn't really think about it; I was making this film. But I always felt there were these film-makers out there, and I wasn't part of that. I was separate from that. I never really considered myself in the system at all.

But, with the facilities at the Centre, are you now looking at the work of other film-makers? You've often mentioned Fellini, a director who not only seems to have been fascinated with physical strangeness on occasion, but who also loves his own locale.

Like *Roma*? Yeah. I love Fellini. And we've got the same birthday, so if you believe in astrology . . . His is a totally different time, and an Italian take on life. But there's something about his films. There's a mood. They make you dream. They're so magical and lyrical and surprising and inventive. The guy was unique. If you took his films away, there would be a giant chunk of cinema missing. There's nothing else around like that. I like Bergman, but his films are so different. Sparse. Sparse dreams.

And I think Herzog is one of the all-time greats. *Really* great. When I was in England once I saw *Stroszek* on TV. I'd missed the beginning of it so I thought it was, like, some real documentary. I was just captivated in the first *two seconds*. I'd never seen anything like it.

Later I met him in New York and he showed me a journal that he'd kept for the past year: *Walking the Perimeter of Germany*. He'd notated every single day, and I said he must have had the world's sharpest pencil! Because this writing was *crystal* clear, but so small you'd need a magnifying glass to read it. The journal was very small – about two inches by two inches – and each page was *filled* with, you know, four or five hundred sentences. It was *unbelievable*!

He can be pretty crazy. He's threatened to shoot people on set!
That's not crazy! Get real, Chris!

All are European directors. Was European cinema more interesting to you at the time?
Yeah, for the kind of thing I wanted to do. You go to films for different reasons: just to go, and then there are ones that get down and thrill your soul. And probably most of those came from Europe.

Is that something to do with the fact that they're not so driven by narrative as American films?
Yes. Exactly. I think so.

What about Jacques Tati? You've mentioned him on occasion.
I *love* that guy. His whole style, and how he sees things. And again, you know, the guy's an inventor, visually, *and* with the sound, choreography and music. Then there's his childlike love of his characters; I really dig it. I met his daughter. But, you know, I hear these stories, how he died a bitter man, and he wasn't really that loved in his own country. And it *kills* me.

What about the prologue to Eraserhead *with The Man in the Planet?*

Obviously, it's very important. How does that relate to Henry's story and the rest of the film?
Oh it relates. I've got to tell you, it relates. 'Prologue' means what goes before, right? That's exactly what it is. It's very important what goes on there. And no one has ever really written about that front part. This Canadian guy, George Godwin, wrote something on it. He came and talked to me and interviewed Jack Nance and wrote his take on it. I wouldn't really talk about it, but I answered some questions for him. But there's certain things that happen in that sequence that are a key to the rest. And, er . . . that's all.

Which are . . .?
They're right there, you know. [Laughs.]

Many readings of aspects of Eraserhead *inevitably end up in the Freudian zone because there are so many obvious . . .*
Things you can latch on to – psychological things, yeah.

Does it bother you that people will come to the movie with an orthodoxy? Any kind of orthodoxy? You seem very resistant to any single meaning being placed on your work – particularly by yourself!
No. See, the thing is, I love the idea that one thing can be different for different people. Everything's that way. Like the O.J. Simpson trial. Everybody hears the same words, they see the same faces, the same expressions, the same anger or frustration or evidence, and they come away with absolutely different verdicts in their minds. Even with a standard spoonfed film, people see it differently. It's just the way it is.

And then there are films or writings that you could read once and then ten years later read again and get way more from. You've changed; the work stays the same. But suddenly it's got way more meaning for you, depending on where you are. I like things that have a kernel of something in them. They have to be abstract. The more concrete they are, the less likely that this thing will happen. The maker has to feel it and know it in a certain way and be honest to it. Every single decision passes through this one person, and if they judge it and do it correctly, then the work holds together for that one person, and they feel it's honest and it's right. And then it's released, and from that point on there's not *one thing* you can do about it. You can talk about it – try to defend it or try to do this or that. It doesn't work. People still hate it. They hate it. It doesn't work for them. And you've lost them. You're not going to get them back. Maybe twenty

years later they'll say, 'My God! I was wrong.' Or maybe, twenty years later, they'll hate it when at first they loved it. Who knows? It's out of your control.

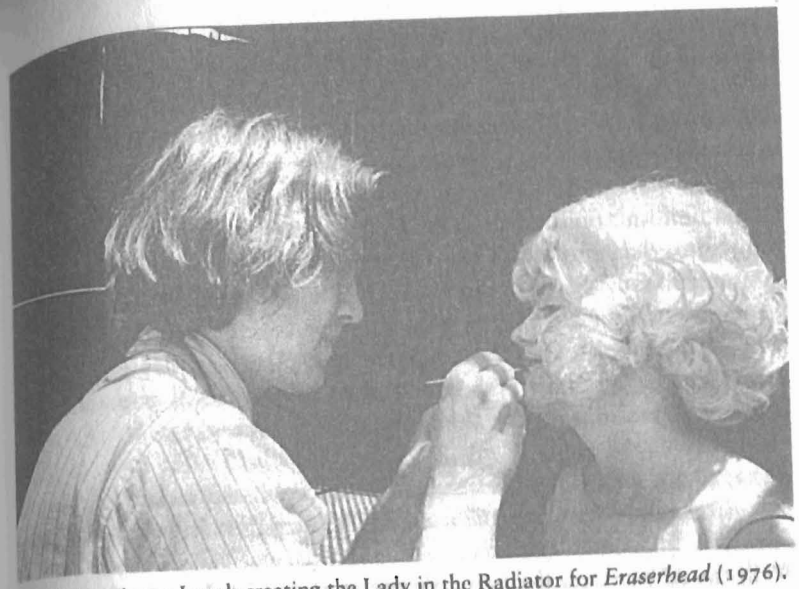
Certain things are just so beautiful to me, and I don't know why. Certain things make so much sense, and it's hard to explain. I *felt* *Eraserhead*, I didn't think it. It was a quiet process: going from inside me to the screen. I'd get something on film, get it paced a certain way, add the right sounds, and then I'd be able to say if it worked or not. Now, just to get to that point, there's a million times more talking. And in Hollywood, if you can't write your ideas down, or if you can't pitch them, or if they're so abstract they can't be pitched properly, then they don't have a chance of surviving. Abstract things are important to a film, but very few people get the chance to really go all out with cinema. Creations are an extension of yourself, and you go out on a limb whenever you create anything. It's a risk.

Isn't the problem with, say, Freudian analysis for you that, inscribed within such an approach, is the tendency to say, 'This does *mean that, because we're all part of the same . . .?'*

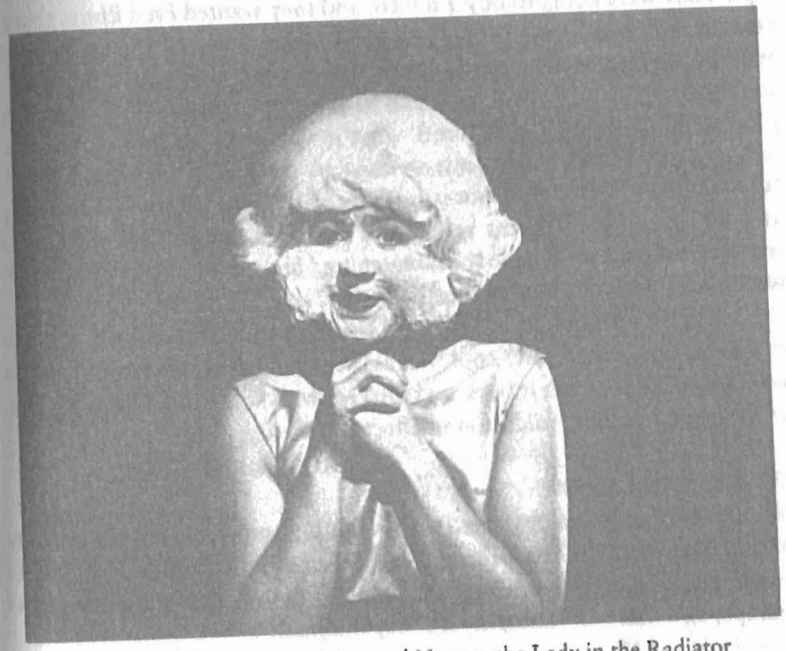
Collective subconscious thing. Yes, but the thing is, if a couple of different psychoanalysts got together they wouldn't agree on everything either. There may be an exact science, but it isn't psychiatry. The whole picture's not locked in yet.

Can we talk a bit about the scenes in the radiator? Years later, when The Man from Another Place turned up unexpectedly in Twin Peaks, *he seemed very much like the Lady in the Radiator. They appear to come from a similar place. Is that true?*

Yes. The floor pattern in Henry's apartment lobby is the same pattern as the floor in the Red Room in *Twin Peaks*. That's one similar factor. The Lady in the Radiator wasn't in the original script for *Eraserhead*. I was sitting in the food room one day and I drew a picture of the Lady in the Radiator, but I didn't know where it came from. But it was meaningful to me when I saw it finally drawn. And then I saw the radiator in my head. And it was an instrument for producing warmth in a room; it made me sort of happy – like me as Henry, say. I saw this opening to another place. So I ran into the set and looked at the radiator more closely. You know, there are many different types of radiators, but I'd never seen another radiator like this. It had a little kind of chamber, like a stage in it. I'm not kidding you. It was right there, and it just changed



Inner happiness. Lynch creating the Lady in the Radiator for *Eraserhead* (1976).



'Suddenly, there she was.' Laurel Near as the Lady in the Radiator in *Eraserhead* (1976).

everything. So then I had to build the doors and the stage, and do the whole thing. One thing led to another, and suddenly there she was.

The Lady in the Radiator had bad skin. I think she had bad acne as a child, and used a lot of pancake make-up to smooth that out. But inside is where the happiness in her comes from. Her outward appearance is not the thing.

So a film isn't finished until it's finished. Anything can come along and you realize that it's almost like the thing *knows* how it will be one day. You might discover some parts of it at first – become excited and fall in love and go – but the thing knows that you haven't seen the whole yet. Will the person discover those other things? The only way is to stay in there, and be watchful and feel it. And maybe they'll pop into your conscious mind. But they've always been there, somewhere.

In 1974, at a time when Eraserhead *was 'on hold', due to lack of finance, you made a little-seen, short film called* The Amputee. *How did that come about?*

Well, the AFI was testing two different stocks of black and white videotape. They were going to buy a bunch, and they wanted Fred Elmes to test them to see which one to buy. So Fred came down to the stables and announced that he was gonna shoot this test the next day. I think they were gonna pay him some money to help him out. And a little light bulb goes off in my head. I said, 'Fred, what're you going to shoot?' He says, 'Oh, I don't know, a test pattern thing or something like that.' I said, 'Would they object if you shot something else? What if I wrote something and we shoot two different versions of the same thing? Then they could see the stock, but we'll have shot something.' So he says, 'I don't think that would be a problem. It may even be better.'

So I stayed up all night writing, and working with Catherine Coulson to build this rig. It was really cool because we couldn't shoot sync sound, so we shot it and then ran it back and foleyed the whole thing live to picture. It was pretty exciting to do sound effects on the fly.

What's the film about?

Well, Catherine is in a chair and she's a double amputee. And she is going over a letter that she has written. She's reading it aloud to herself, in her head. And a doctor comes in – that's me – just to clean the ends of the stumps, and that's it. [Laughs.] It's very minimal!

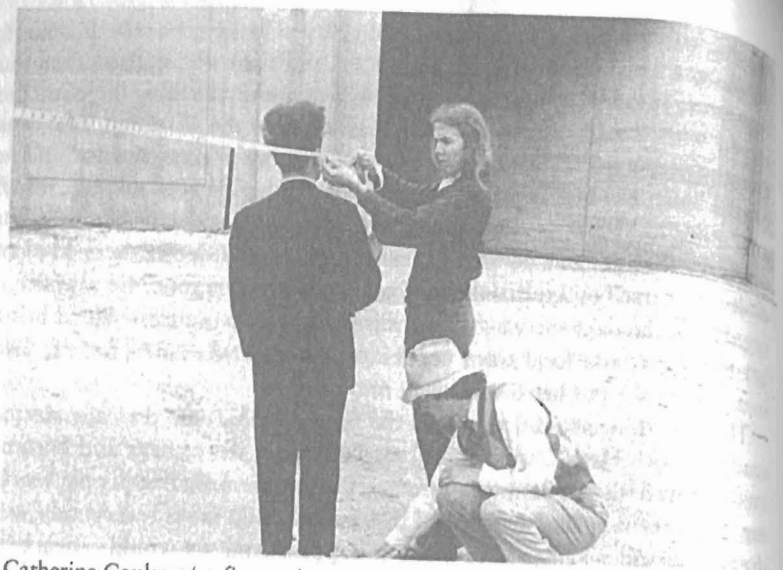
Catherine Coulson seems to have been very important to Eraserhead.

Oh yes, very much so. Jack Nance, who played Henry, was her husband. So she got involved with it through that. And then she realized that she was a very important, necessary ingredient to make this thing happen. She stayed with the film from the very beginning to the very end. She was going to play a nurse. Henry and Mary were going to go to the hospital to get the baby, but that scene was never shot. Catherine kept joking, 'When am I going to shoot my scene?', like five years later, and stuff like this. But Catherine has got this personality where she sort of denies every kind of desire for herself and fulfils those of others. When everyone else was sleeping during the day, she was out earning money as a waitress. She'd bring her tips back, and food from the restaurant, and take care of stuff. And many times she put her own money into the film.

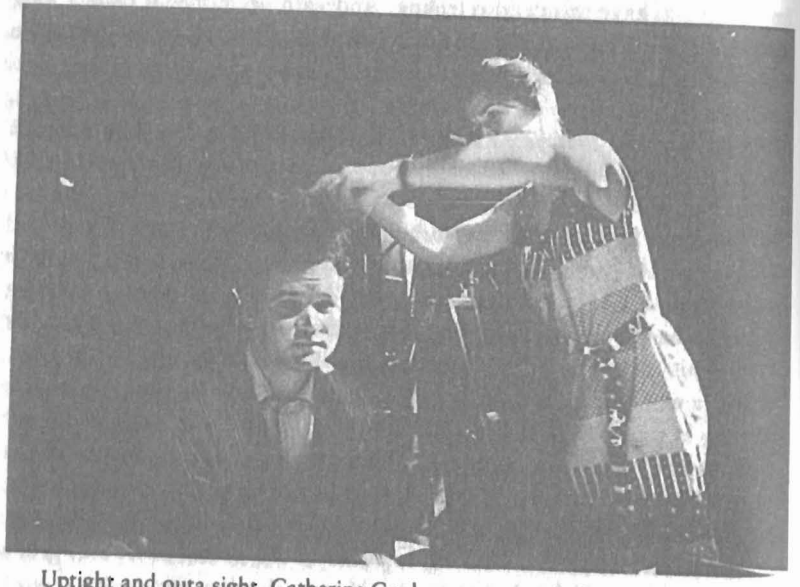
The first thing she did was hold the boom for Al. And then she started studying with Herb Cardwell and learned about the camera and became an ace first assistant camera operator. There were only five people working, so everybody had a job. And if we did a dolly move, everybody was doing one-and-a-half jobs to make it happen. And we would rehearse it and rehearse it. Herb was a stickler for smooth dolly moves. And he would teach us to push a dolly. But the word 'smooth' became super important: to have this certain feeling. And with no money it took a long time. Everything took a *long* time. Because we didn't really know what we were doing. It was all based on common sense.

Coulson has said that years before her appearance as The Log Lady in Twin Peaks, *you predicted she would appear in a television series one day with a log. Was that a joke?*

No. I had this idea during *Eraserhead* that I described to her and Jack and whoever would listen. [Laughs.] And it was called *I'll Test My Log with Every Branch of Knowledge*! It's a half-hour television show starring Catherine as the lady with the log. Her husband has been killed in a forest fire and his ashes are on the mantelpiece, with his pipes and his sock hat. He was a woodsman. But the fireplace is completely boarded up. Because she now is very afraid of fire. And she has a small child, but she doesn't drive, so she takes cabs. And each show would start with her making a phone call to some expert in one of the many, many fields of knowledge. Maybe on this particular day she calls a dentist, but she makes the appointment for her log. And the log goes in the dental chair and gets a little bib and chain and the dentist X-rays the log for cavities, goes through the whole thing, and the son is also there. Because she is teaching her son through his observations of what the log is going through. And



Catherine Coulson (as first assistant camera operator), with husband Jack Nance and Lynch, lining up a shot for *Eraserhead* (1976).



Uptight and outa sight. Catherine Coulson teases up Jack Nance's hair for *Eraserhead* (1976).

then sometimes they go to a diner and they never get to where they're going. That was the idea. You'd learn something each week, see? For real! In an absurd sort of world.

How did that manifest itself finally in Twin Peaks?

Well, we were shooting the pilot, and we're coming up to this scene in the Town Council meeting and it struck me that Catherine had to be in this scene. And all she was gonna do was hold a log and turn the lights on and off to get people's attention – there's something about a lady with a log, you know . . . we got a lot of feedback about her, and so she became like a regular character.

Did Catherine do Jack Nance's famous hairdo?

The first night, Charlotte Stewart did Jack's hair, but again that hair was fate. I wanted Jack's hair to stand up – be short on the sides and tall on the top. But Jack had a particular type of hair, that when you tease it, and then comb it, it just stays. It was the most fantastic head of hair. And when we first saw what happened for the tall look, and how tall it was, we were shocked. After a few minutes I said, 'This is it!' And it became absolutely normal to us, after two or three weeks. Whenever we went out, we'd put Jack in the back seat of the car. He'd sit there, made up in the suit, and we'd take him out to locations, but we'd always have to keep him in the middle of the back seat, out of sight!

Jack was such a professional, I can't tell you. *Unbelievable!* You felt he'd been in the theatre or old films for, like, a million years or something. He'd come with all this stuff. He had this little bag of make-up and little brushes and, you know, weird little things he'd set out, and just go to work.

Now he's dead, he'll be remembered for his role as Henry more than for any other part. He achieved a sort of iconic, cult status because of the movie.

I consider Jack one of my best friends. Starting with *Eraserhead,* we worked together on six features over twenty-five years – as well as the *Twin Peaks* television series. Jack was the unsung hero of actors. I'll miss his dry, absurdist wit, his stories and his friendship. I'll miss all the characters he would have played.

You and Jack did a lot of rehearsal for Eraserhead, *didn't you? There was a lot of meticulous attention to detail.*

Yeah. There was a period of time where we would rehearse – just me and Jack in that room – and work things out. And those rehearsals took a *long*, long time. Not only was it important for the film, but Jack loved details. And so we would almost break it down into, like, quarter-inch moves. It was weird.

Like animation?
Yeah, almost like that. Every little thing would be planned. It may just be walking from the corner, past the dresser, to here. But it was so fantastic how it could be. It was just a walk, but a million things could go on in Henry's brain as he crossed. And we had a lot of little inkie lights, making little pools of light. So Herb spent a long time lighting. Both Herb Cardwell and Fred Elmes were painstaking, and we found our rhythm. After a film's been going for a couple of years you find your rhythm! It kinda slowed to one or two shots a night. A master shot would definitely take all night.

Those moments when things are talking to you are really when the camera's running. And because the camera's running, people respect that – it's a kinda religious thing, almost – everyone's nice and quiet, and everyone's doing their thing, and that's the first time you really see it.

Doesn't that put a lot of pressure on that first take?
Yes, it does. In that first take a million things are screaming at you. It's a strange thing, but once you sorta see something, chances are the actors will feel the truth of that. And it's because you're, for one time, there, all together in this thing. And it's pretty real. And so it sometimes can happen very fast. If something feels not quite right, it becomes really apparent. In rehearsals it used to be very quiet – there were only five people working on it – and things evolved and were worked out down to the subatomic particles almost, and that's what I love.

When you were looking at dailies, was there much discussion amongst the key people about what had been achieved and what wasn't right?
Yeah. One of Herb's expressions was, 'When you see dailies, there should be no surprises.' Especially after you've done tests and you're rolling. The lab has got the look that you want. They develop it this way, and print it that way. There are no surprises. And so most of the time there were none. But like I told you, there were several things that we reshot, and that was really a bummer, because it took us so long to do some of those things the first time. And with black and white, if you want to see it, you've got to

light it. And there are so many dark things in the movie. Colours automatically separate from each other.

I understand that you screened Sunset Boulevard *for everyone before you began filming* Eraserhead. *Why that movie?*
Sunset Boulevard is in my top five movies, for sure. But there wasn't anything in particular about it that related to *Eraserhead*. It was just a black and white experience of a certain mood.

The characters in that movie also occupy a very particular world; a dead Hollywood. A past.
That's right. It's like one avenue into that other world, and a really beautiful avenue. I talked to Billy Wilder, and that mansion wasn't even on Sunset Boulevard! So I wished I hadn't heard that, you know. Of *course* it was on Sunset Boulevard! There it is, right there! And it's still there somewhere.

A Hollywood mansion in another dimension. William Holden and Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

I wondered whether it had something to do with that movie's prologue. We're being told the story by a corpse; someone who might be 'dreaming' or inventing the entire film for us.
Maybe, yeah. You've gotta reach for it! Obviously, there's gotta be something similar because I love it so much. But I don't know what it is.

Is Henry dreaming the film up? Or is he being dreamt?
See, that's something I can't say.

I suppose what I'm asking is, where is the point of view in the film? At times it's hard to tell.
That's good. I wouldn't even know what to say about that. Maybe if I wrote, I'd do it in the first person, third person . . . I don't know. It is what it is.

If you yourself decide on one interpretation of events before you start shooting a film – or while you're making it – do you feel that you will somehow limit the possibilities for the film?
Yes, but, you see, I don't even think about that. And I don't know quite how to tell you how I do think about it. But you know it *enough* to tell somebody what to do in this scene. And then when they do it, you know enough to say, 'That part is great and this part is not right.' You could say to the actor, 'It's not right because . . .' and you start saying why. But you might use an analogy or something that has nothing to do with it, but they get it enough. And then when they do it correctly, they don't even know the depth of the rightness of it, but it's right.

How much did you work on the way characters spoke in the film? The sparse dialogue seems to be delivered in a very particular way.
Well, it had to be a certain way. And it came out of rehearsals. There are many ways they could speak that would be completely wrong. And so you keep working for the way that is right for the character, right for the mood. You get into phrasing, loud and soft, and this and that. You could see dialogue as kind of a sound effect or a musical effect. And yet it has all this stuff to do with character. And once that way is found, they just talk correctly. Hopefully, a lot of these things are found early on, and nailed down.

There's also a thickness to the soundtrack. A continuous, almost subliminal, 'presence'.
I'm real fascinated by presences – what you call 'room tone'. It's the sound

that you hear when there's silence, in between words or sentences. It's a tricky thing, because in this seemingly kind of quiet sound, some feelings can be brought in, and a certain kind of picture of a bigger world can be made. And all those things are important to make that world.

One of those presences seems to be electricity: the noise and power of electrical current. Eraserhead *is only the first manifestation of your fascination with electricity. What is that about?*
I don't understand it either . . . There are things that come into the home, you know . . . things that are built or created outside the house, which all speak about the time, and about the life. And then if something goes wrong with those things, or if they're not in good working order, it can mean something else too.

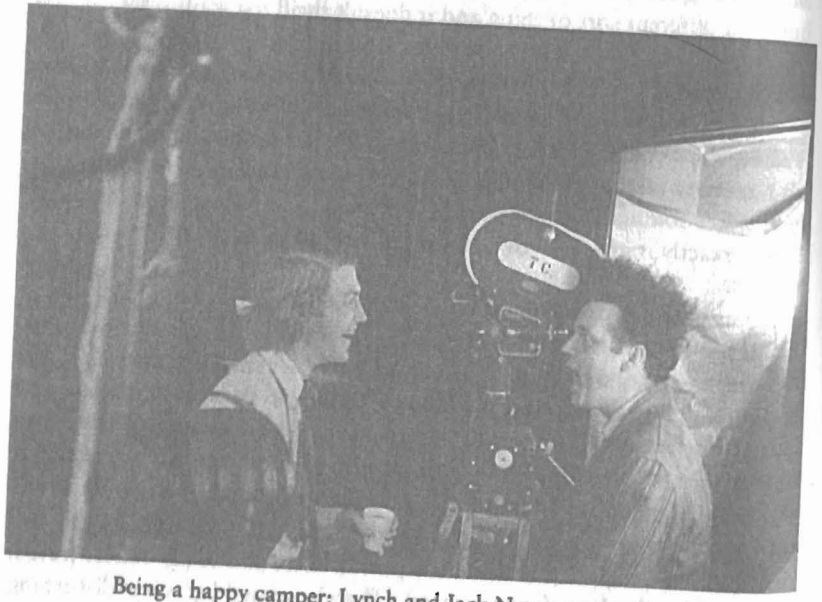
I just happen to like electricity but I'm not really wild about the new plugs in America. I like forties and thirties electricity. And I like smokestack industry. And I like fire, and I like smoke, and I like the noise. But sounds have become little. The sound of a computer is just a Mickey Mouse thing compared to real power. And yet there's a lot of power there, but it's a different sort of thing and it doesn't thrill my soul.

Many scenes in your films feature the failure of electricity: the faulty neons in the autopsy room in Twin Peaks; *the buzzing light fittings in Dorothy Vallens's apartment block in* Blue Velvet, *for example. Electrical currents also seem to announce imminent danger or revelation, as in the strobe-light effect you use constantly in* Twin Peaks.
Right, exactly, right. Exactly. And what it means, I don't know.

Electricity becomes linked with the inexplicable.
Yeah, but scientists don't understand it. They say, 'It's moving electrons.' But there's a certain point where they say, 'We don't know why that happens.' I'm not a scientist and I haven't talked to these guys that are into electricity, but it is a force. When electrons run down a wire – do they have that power. It's amazing. How did a plug or an outlet get to be shaped that way? And light bulbs: I can feel these random electrons, you know, hitting me. It's like when you go under power lines. If you were blindfolded, and drove down a highway under those power lines, and really concentrated, you could tell when they occurred. There's something very disturbing about that amount of electricity – they know these things now. A tumour grows in the head. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not, you know, whacking you.

It becomes very sinister via its association with Killer Bob in Twin Peaks.
Yes, well something strange is happening when Bob is around. There are, maybe, some worlds coming together. It's not like dancing in the living room in the evening on a normal summer night! Other things are going on. There's like a wind or a disturbance, and openings for different things to come in.

Given that Eraserhead *was made over a five-year period, it must have been very difficult to maintain such an essentially hermetic world.*
It was horrifying. Yet I like talking about *Eraserhead* because it pulls me back into one of the most beautiful times. And great memories. But in between, when we ran out of money, I was always amazed that so many things held for the film. Jack's hair didn't suddenly change, and the stables and the American Film Institute were still there. There was one shot where Henry walks down the hall, turns the doorknob and a year and a half later he comes through the door! Those things can be extremely frightening, to think about holding a mood and a correctness, something that will stick together after five years. It's pretty hard.



Being a happy camper: Lynch and Jack Nance swap places on the set of *Eraserhead* (1976).

Did you despair about ever finishing the film?
I despaired plenty. At one time I was thinking of building a small, eight-inch-tall Henry, and animating him through some small cardboard sets, just to fill in the blanks! There are dark times in every picture, and even after every picture. Not everybody loves what you've done and negativity is a powerful thing. And even the positive things are upsetting in a way because then you want to please the people the next time again. You've got to just think about the work, but it's not always easy. I despaired a couple of times during *The Elephant Man* that I would make it through, and at the end of *Dune*. So much had gone into it and it was such a disappointment.

I feel now that I shouldn't have spent so much time on *Eraserhead*. I should like to have made more films in that time, but it wasn't happening. It was extremely frustrating to hold on to everything for so long. I couldn't do anything new because *Eraserhead* wasn't finished. I didn't have anything to show anybody. So I just saw the world going by and tried to raise money and, little by little, I did it.

And yet, looking at the contact sheets of what seems like hundreds of photographs taken during the production of the movie, you're smiling in virtually every one.
I was a happy camper. Are you kidding me? Very rarely was I, you know, hanging my head. And in those days I was building everything. I'd get Jack to help me, or Fred or Catherine. We were putting on our own play, you know what I mean? It was so fantastic. And I had my paper route! And soy beans. I was really into soy beans then. They're very hard to digest – I wouldn't recommend them, really! These were dry-roasted in a jar, and they were very reasonably priced, and I knew they were healthy, so I'd eat those. It was not a bad time.

But you did have Peggy and Jennifer to think about. Were your own family supportive of your decision to make a film at the possible expense of your home situation?
Well, one night I went to my parents' house, and my brother and my sister were there – which was kind of rare. *Eraserhead* had been shut down for quite a while and we were shooting piecemeal whenever I got enough money. But I had Jennifer, and I had no money. And so my *younger* brother and my father sit me down in a kind of a darkened living room. My brother is now working for Boeing Aircraft and is very responsible. He's got a very strange experimental streak in him, but he's still very responsible.

So they sat me down and told me it was time that I gave up this idea of the film and got a job. And it affected me, like, to my core. It was a very, very emotional and horrifying night. But the end result was I couldn't do that. I was lost in this land of *Eraserhead* for, you know, who knows how long? But they'd tipped their hand, and now I knew what the thinking was. I felt even more on my own.

It all worked out, but that could've been that. I always said that you can't start something else when you're that deep into one thing and it's not finished. You're locked there until you find a way to finish it.

When the movie was finally finished, did your parents say, 'Well, it was worth it. It worked out.'?
Except for that one evening, which was really more about Jennifer and my ex-wife Peggy than me, my parents have been extremely supportive. My father paid for half of *The Alphabet* and, while I was at the AFI, he gave me a monthly allowance. He was always giving me money. He kept track of how much I owed him, and one of my happiest days was paying my father back. He wouldn't have cared if I hadn't, but it was so fantastic! My parents don't understand the pictures, necessarily, or why I do what I do, but they're still supportive.

I understand that eventually the AFI had to pull the plug on the film because of some complication about feature production. What happened exactly?
My world was very small, but going on in the outer world was *Easy Rider*. And *Easy Rider* was gonna have repercussions for the American Film Institute, because one of the things that they wanted to do was make feature films. It seems to me they had an agreement with some studios to fund feature films through the AFI for like $250,000 or $500,000. And then, suddenly, the studio heard how little *Easy Rider* cost and they said, 'Wait a minute!'; I don't know what they said after they said 'Wait a minute!', but they didn't want to give the money to the AFI any more. I think it had to do with the fear that the AFI would create films that would be good enough to compete with their films. And then the unions said, 'If we give equipment and expertise to you AFI folks, that's great, but if you produce feature films that are in competition with our work, that's not good.' So the AFI passed an ordinance: no more feature films.

Before all this Stanton Kaye was a film-making fellow at the Centre and he got the go-ahead to make the AFI's first feature film. It was a *huge*

production and it was called *In Pursuit of Treasure*. It was going to be shot in Utah. But there were problems from the beginning. *Big* problems! At a certain point, they didn't have anybody to build these gold bricks – the treasure. Tony Vellani found out I could cast plaster. So I was flown up to Utah and I worked with this guy named Happy, making gold bricks in the basement of this hotel. It was pretty weird! Then I got tired of making gold bricks all day, so I said, 'Look, my buddy, Jack Fisk, can cast stuff. I'm going to bring him up here.' Jack wanted to be an art director so it was perfect. So Jack and I traded places and I went home. But this film never got finished, and a lot of money was spent on it. That was another nail in the coffin of feature films for the AFI.

So when *Eraserhead* was looking like it was going to be a feature, they needed to distance themselves from it. So we came to this 'Made in association with . . .' thing. And then they did the greatest thing for me. Because I needed to raise more money, and my percentage points were quickly disappearing, they gave me 40 more of *their* 50 per cent. So I had 90 per cent to use to raise money. People are still making money on it. Everybody that invested in it has gotten their money back and made a profit. And it still goes on. It's amazing that it worked out as good as it did.

What about the baby? How was it made?
I don't want to talk about it.

I gather that even Stanley Kubrick wanted to know . . .
Well, Kubrick paid me the highest compliment. Just before we started shooting *The Elephant Man* in England, some guys from Lucas Films came over. They stopped in to visit Jonathan Sanger and they said hello to me. We were all talking in the hall at Lee International Studios in Wembley and they said, 'We're glad we saw you, David, because last night we were out at Elstree, and we met Kubrick. And we were talking and he said, "Do you guys want to come to my house tonight and see my favourite film?"' And they said, 'Yeah!' And so they went and it was *Eraserhead*. That was a hair of euphoria. Because I think Kubrick's one of the all-time greats. Almost every one of his films is in my top ten.

Just to return to the baby for a moment. Is the point not to talk about it, or what?
Just not to *do* anything.

I thought you'd made it. That it was your creation?

I never have said that, and I never will. It could've been made by somebody else. It could've been found. Everybody and his little brother now knows how things are done. Just like finding out the house wasn't on Sunset Boulevard. Or like *Cliffhanger*. More people have seen how they did the helicopter shot in that than people have seen the movie! Magicians keep their secrets to themselves. And they know that as soon as they tell, someone will say, 'Are you *kidding* me? That's so simple.' It's *horrifying* to me, that they do that. People don't realize it, but as soon as they hear or see that, something dies inside them. They're deader than they were. They're not, like, happy to know about this stuff. They're happy *not* to know about it. And they *shouldn't* know about it. It's nothing to do with the film! And will only *ruin* the film! Why would they talk about it? It's *horrifying*!

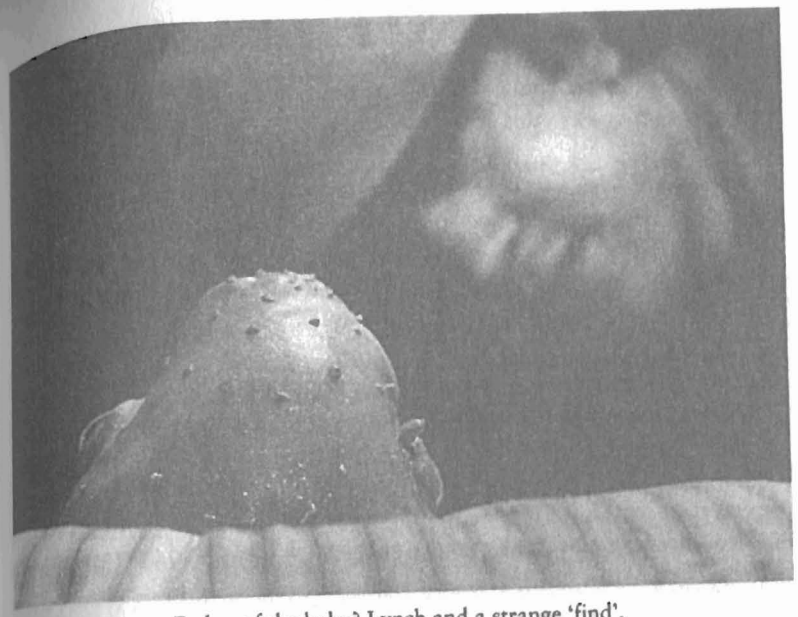
Although, as you yourself said, where there's a secret there is a terrible desire to find out more.
There are some secrets that, when you learn them, something comes with that learning that is more than the loss of now knowing. Those kind of secrets are different. And I believe in those. But talking about how certain things happened in a film, to me, takes a lot away from the film.

I read somewhere that you dissected a cat during the making of Eraserhead, *to get some ideas for textures in the film.*
I examined its parts, the membranes, the hair, the skin, and there are so many textures which may be pretty gross on one side, but when you isolate them and consider them more abstractly, they are totally beautiful.

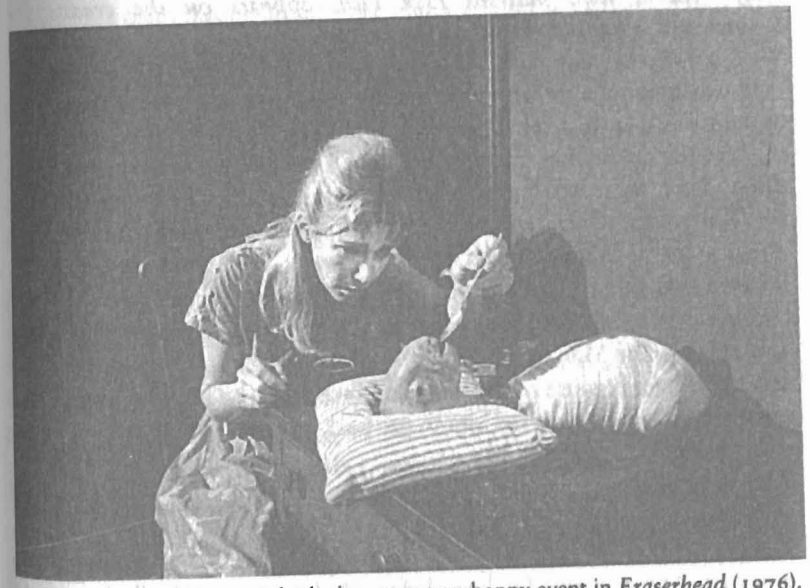
Your daughter Jennifer once said in a documentary that a lot had been made of the autobiographical aspect of Eraserhead *– of you being the reluctant art school father – and that because she was born with club feet, the baby was inspired by her. That's very literal, isn't it?*
Sure. Obviously, since a person is alive and they're noticing things around them, ideas are going to come. But that would mean there'd be a hundred million *Eraserhead* stories out there. Everybody has a kid and they make *Eraserhead*? It's *ridiculous*! It's not just that. It's a million other things.

But it was during Eraserhead *that you and Peggy parted?*
Yes. It was about a year into the movie.

It must have been very difficult for someone outside of that very 'closed'



Father of the baby? Lynch and a strange 'find'.



Mary (Charlotte Stewart) feeds the premature happy event in *Eraserhead* (1976).

world of Eraserhead *to know how to fit in. Particularly if you're shooting at night and sleeping during the day.*
Yes. Maybe that was part of it. But we separated in the most friendly way and remain friends to this day.

In those early days, was it very difficult trying to make a film the only way you could, and maintain a personal life of husband and father?
Difficult? [Laughs.] See, I never was going to get married. I'd sort of perceived this kinda other life. I really wanted to live this thing called the 'Art Life', where you're just in it all the time.

Do you find it easier now to keep things together?
It's easier, because in the beginning you're climbing and you want to have as little baggage as possible. You've got things to do. And then later, certain things have happened, and if they give you a little bit of security in this strange world, it's easier. But there are still many, many things to do, and you need time to think. You've gotta catch ideas, and distractions are killers. They're just *killers*!

Sissy Spacek, who married Jack Fisk, appears on the credits for Eraserhead. *What did she do on the movie?*
Well, before they got married, Jack brought Sissy over to the set one day. Jack was making a lot of money art directing and Sissy was making a lot of money acting. Jack got a job with Billy Friedkin who was prepping two or three films. Friedkin was very hot then. One film was a Surrealist kinda thing. They were looking at a lot of Magrittes, and Jack was bringing books in and stuff. He was on the payroll for several weeks and bringing down a lot of money, which he didn't really need. And he felt guilty, because this thing wasn't really taking any time. So he'd sign the pay cheques over to me. And Sissy came and helped out sometimes. When Jack was playing The Man in the Planet she did the slate and helped. Jack was in a lot of pain because of the body and face make-up I put on him in that scene. It took three days for him to get back to normal!

Why did you change cinematographer mid-production from Herb Cardwell to Frederick Elmes?
Well, Herb shot for nine months. He was one of the strangest people I've ever met. And a *genius* for knowledge. He knew scientifically how light did what it did when it struck the film. And the process of development and printing. He knew *everything*. He could build and design complicated

mechanical things. He understood so much more than he needed to understand. Something in his brain was just sucking up information, you know, facts and things. And it would, like, make him tired. He just couldn't help taking things in. A *really* great guy.

But Herb was running out of money, and he came to me one day and said that he was gonna have to leave. We had no money. He took a commercial that was going to be shot in Rio. Fred Elmes was in the next year of fellows at the AFI, and Tony Vellani told me that he thought Fred would be the best replacement. So for two weeks Fred worked with Herb, in the transition. They were very similar, strangely enough.

Herb drove with both feet. His left foot did the brake, and his right foot did the gas. And he's an excellent pilot. And the smoothest driver I've *ever* ridden with. How many times, when you're being driven and you turn a corner, are you just *thrown* over to one side or the other? With Herb, you're not. He accelerates part-way through the turn in such a way that you don't feel a thing. When you do feel that thing, it goes into your stomach and you become tight. So riding in a car fills you with tension. With Herb, you just suddenly realize, this is a different experience. It's *unbelievable*!

There are many stories about Herb that are fantastically mysterious. On *Eraserhead* we would finish work and instead of coming back to the house – Alan and Herb lived with us and sometimes my brother was there – Herb would go somewhere else. No one knew where Herb went. He'd come back and he was always kinda tired. He'd say some things, but they were like riddles, really. I still don't know what Herb was doing. Everybody, including his wife, thought that Herb could be leading a double life. But if he was, it was so well hidden. He was a mystery.

Later, he got a job flying on airplanes, installing these 16mm film-chains that show movies. It was before video. He and five other guys would put new systems into planes and then fly and troubleshoot it if anything went wrong. One time they flew to England, landed at Gatwick and went to a hotel near the airport. The next day, they were going to meet for breakfast, get back on a plane and go somewhere else. Herb was always late. *Always*. So they were all there at breakfast, but Herb wasn't. They called up and there's no answer. And they called again. No answer. So they went up and knocked on the door. No answer. Finally they got the manager and said, 'We can't find this guy. He's supposed to be here at breakfast. Maybe you should open up the room.' And the manager opened the room. And Herb was dead. In his bed. Two autopsies were done on Herb, and they still don't know why he died.

Once the movie was completed, you then had the problem of releasing it. This must have felt strange, given that you'd all been a part of this extremely hermetic world for so long. Now your creation has to go out into the world. How did that work?

Well, first I tried to get it into Cannes. Some people from the Festival came to the AFI when we were mixing. We mixed the whole film in eight days, but everything was so prepped and ready that it wasn't hard. I let these people in because they were so sympathetic, and I could just tell I liked them. They were from the Directors' Fortnight or something. And they said some very kind things about *Eraserhead*.

Then we showed it to one guy who was a friend of Terrence Malick – his financial backer, I think. Terry was trying to help me get some money and he said, 'I want you to show some scenes to this man, maybe he'll help you.' But Terry had not seen anything. So we organized several scenes, and this man came in and sat down and I was, you know, trembling. I was at the console with Al. And in the middle of this thing the man stood up and screamed: 'PEOPLE DON'T ACT LIKE THAT! PEOPLE DON'T TALK LIKE THAT! THIS IS BULLSHIT!' And out he went. But, like, *really* upset. And Ron, the projectionist upstairs, heard this and everybody was just looking at each other. So I thought, *'Man!'*, you know, 'This is gonna be really difficult!'

Al and I didn't know anything about Cannes, but it became a goal. But then I got real sick, and *Eraserhead* wasn't a composite print yet. There were twelve rolls of picture and twelve rolls of sound. So I got a shopping cart from the Farmer's Market. I even went upstairs to the manager of the grounds and explained what I wanted to do: I had to go to New York and I had all this film. And he said, 'If you knew how many of these things were stolen, and you come up and *ask* me? You're damn right you can take it and I *know* you'll bring it back!'

So I got this shopping cart loaded up and I took the last bit of money out of the bank account to get this ticket to New York City – a red-eye. I waited till the screening room opened up and then went downtown and delivered the film. The projectionist was the only person I saw and he said, 'Set it over there with the others, and I'll get it up on the screen as soon as I can.' And I see, like, five films ahead of me. So all day I'm up and down the sidewalk having coffees and doughnuts, you know, and my head is just like a piece of clay from this flu I have. And finally, like at four in the afternoon or something, they started showing *Eraserhead*. I was listening from the door, going out and coming back in, and it was going the slowest it's *ever* gone. And I'm dying a million deaths. Finally, it's over and I get

back on the plane and come back to LA. And three days later, after phoning and trying to find out if they said anything, a person tells me that no one was in the theatre! No *one was there*. They had gone back two days earlier, and the projectionist was running to an empty house! So that was Cannes.

Then I got rejected by the New York Film Festival. So then Mary said, 'What about the Los Angeles Film Festival?' And I said, 'I can't do it.' And she said, 'This is the last day they're taking entries. I'm going to put the stuff in the car, and we're going down there.' And I said, 'OK, I've been rejected by Cannes, and New York, I might as well get rejected here.' And down I went and told them the same thing. And this guy said, 'Wait a minute! We're not the New York Film Festival. We're not Cannes. We're gonna look at this thing. Relax!' And it got in. It was shown at midnight, and there was a *terrible* review in *Variety*. It was not a well-received thing.

After that screening I went home. It was like two in the morning and I drove over to Fred Elmes's house. I sat in the car with Fred and I told him every scene I was going to cut, and exactly where it was gonna be cut, so I wouldn't forget it. And the next day I cut this composite print, which you're not supposed to do. But I just cut it and rearranged it, because I'd been wanting – needing – to do it. It was like so *long* this other way, it was not working. It's still long for a lot of people.

This guy who'd seen it at the LA Film Festival mentioned it to Ben Barenholz and he asked for a print. What Ben says is that when the first reel was on he walked out of the screening room and made a call and said he wanted it. He sent this guy Fred Baker out to make the deal, and we made the deal in Schwab's drugstore! Which was pretty cool! Back to *Sunset Boulevard*.

What had you taken out?

Three or four scenes. One was the dime scene. A portion of it is still there, but originally it was a sequence of things that Henry saw. The first was two children in the alleyway, but they were in shadow and they were small people. It was a daytime scene, but there's smoke and dust blowing. You could barely see them. They're scratching in the dirt, and they find these tightly packed rows of dimes and start digging for more. Henry sees this from his window, and he quickly leaves the room. He gets halfway down the hall and the baby starts crying. But he doesn't stop, and goes all the way down, but he has to take the stairs because the elevator is broken. He gets into the lobby and the sound of the baby is coming down the elevator shaft. So he kicks this couch leg, at which point his landlady comes out,

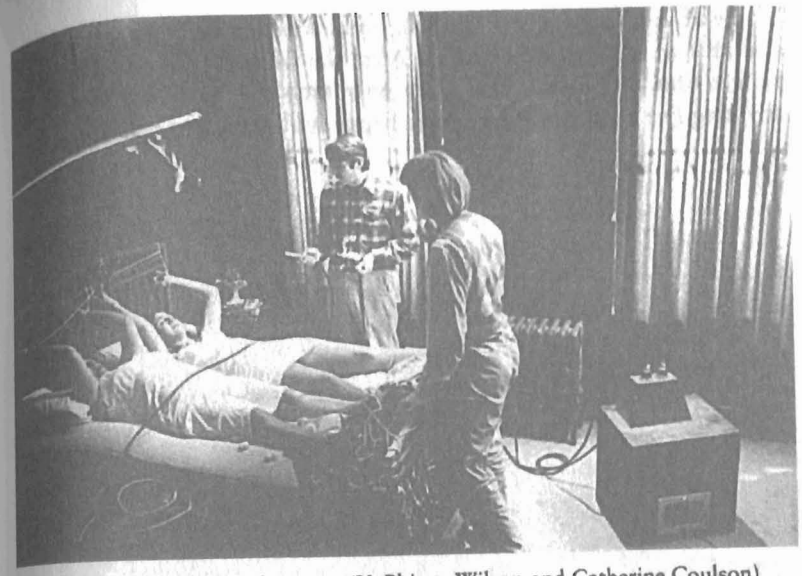
starts in on him and sends him back to his room. I loved this whole little sequence. When Henry returns to his room he sees that the kids are gone and some adults are fighting over the dimes – digging, then not digging, now fighting. It turns into night and they're still fighting over the dimes. A little bit of that fight is still there.

That night Jack Nance stuffed a bunch of dimes in his pockets. I had, like, fifty dollars' worth out there in the dirt. To me, that was like having 500 million dollars in the dirt, and I wanted every one of those dimes back! So Jack is on the upper-storey balcony of the stables, and he's screaming, 'Yeah, Lynch! We've worked for you for five years, and you want your money!' and stuff like this. He's really laying into me. And he's got his grubby little hands on my dimes. That was when I made the final decision to make sure everybody had points in the film. They had them already, but I think I boosted them up! [Laughs.]

Wasn't there another scene taken out, involving two women tied to a bed?
Yeah. Henry sees into a room and there's two women tied to a bed, and a man with an electrical box. It was a beautiful thing. It had two terminals coming off the top and these big cables, and the man is just sort of testing them, and *big* sparks are leaping off these things, and he's moving towards the women. And Henry leaves that scene! [Laughs.] The reason I took that out was it was too disturbing to the film. I didn't want anyone even to think about what was next door. It just clouded and disturbed it.

The movie found its niche as part of the late-night circuit, around the time of the early John Waters movies. Did that help the film?
Yeah. John Waters was another guy that helped me out a lot. One of his films was opening – I'm not sure which it was – but he'd already established himself as this underground rebel. And he did a Q and A or something after a screening of his new film, and he didn't talk about his film. He just told people they had to go and see *Eraserhead*! It really helped the film. It played seventeen cities regularly. And in those days, which is unfortunately not the case now, midnight screenings were really strong. So at the Nuart here in LA, for instance, it played for four years. It only played one night a week, but every day of the week it was on the marquee. So whether people had seen it or not it became known over four years. I wish they would do that more. There are a lot of films that could make it if they had that venue.

In some respects it would be virtually impossible to do Eraserhead *now.*

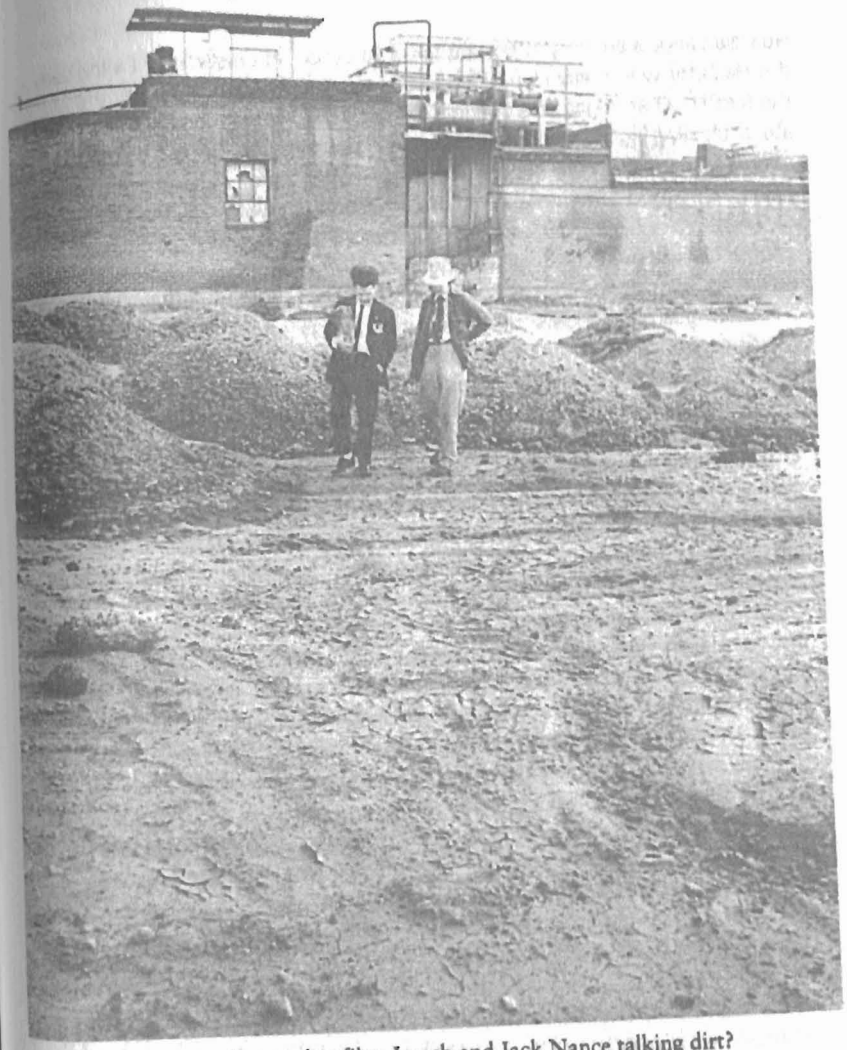


'Too disturbing.' Wired women (V. Phipps Wilson and Catherine Coulson) and Man with cigar and terminals (Gil Dennis) about to make sparks for *Eraserhead* (1976). Lynch directs.

Not to make it, but it would be virtually impossible to deliver it to an audience because that 'underground' circuit barely exists now. Theatrical venues and distributors rarely take such risks today. All the truly experimental work is taking place on video in art galleries.
I'm sure that's right, but I don't want to think about it. If people want it, it will come back in some way. For a while it looks like independent films are gone, and then the next year there are twenty great independent films. You never know what's going to be coming round the bend. There are probably some young film-makers who are just cooking with ideas. The second they get a hold of some money and a camera, they're going to make something very experimental and take tremendous risks. And then those films will come out. Cinema kind of gets spurts now and again and these move it along and shake things up. Same way with the big films. *No one* can predict what's going to happen. It's fantastic that they can't.

Obviously, the whole Eraserhead *period was a very special time for you. But what – in hindsight – did you think of the actual film?*
Well, for some reason we had to look at some new prints of *Eraserhead* a

couple of years after it was finished. And I was in a different sort of place and able to just relax and see it. After the film was over I said, 'It's a perfect film.' [Laughs.] That's the only time I've ever said that about anything I've done. I was just really happy with it on that one day.



Perfect day, perfect film. Lynch and Jack Nance talking dirt?

4

A Bug Dreams of Heaven

Shed Building and *The Elephant Man*

Guardian angels are very important to David Lynch. In *Eraserhead* it's the Lady in the Radiator who really loves Henry. She returns to comfort him at the end of the film, in what might be a scene of the afterlife. When they touch they generate a blinding light in an otherwise dark and industrial vision. In the closing minutes of *Wild at Heart* The Good Witch saves Sailor Ripley from himself by telling him not to turn his back on love, reuniting him with Lula. And at the close of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* the dead Laura Palmer, still trapped in the Lodge, has her own vision of an angel. She weeps with joy; maybe now she will be saved. Music entitled 'The Voice of Love' swells on the soundtrack.

These guardian angels may be what Lynch refers to as 'abstractions'; creations from the minds of his characters, and/or actual manifestations from another place – in this case a place of love. A place beyond fear, violence, loneliness and darkness. A place not crawling with red ants.

After *Eraserhead,* Lynch was to meet his own guardian angel in the person of Stuart Cornfeld. At the time a young executive producer working for Mel Brooks, Cornfeld had seen *Eraserhead* at its first midnight screening at the Nuart cinema in Los Angeles – along with twenty other people – on a tip-off from a friend at the AFI Centre. 'I was just 100 per cent blown away,' he recalls. 'I thought it was the greatest thing I'd ever seen. It was such a cleansing experience.'

This marked the beginning of an important relationship that led to *The Elephant Man,* the film that launched Lynch's career. Although *Eraserhead* announced an extraordinary and original talent, it was far from obvious how that talent might then be allowed to develop or find its place in a notoriously conservative American film industry – even at an independent level. *The Elephant Man* perhaps saved Lynch from spending the next five years attempting to realize another low-budget, wholly personal vision.

Lynch's unshakeable trust in fate must have been vindicated when Cornfeld – who had never done this before – called the director at home. He was in no doubt as to who should direct *The Elephant Man,* despite a strong suggestion from Mel Brooks that it be Alan Parker. 'I just kept saying: "It's gotta be David Lynch. It's gotta be David Lynch. It's just gotta be fucking David Lynch!" I was a very forceful advocate because I was, like, born again.'

Although Lynch is quick to credit Mel Brooks for his hands-off support once the movie was up and running, it's possible he never knew just how hard Brooks eventually fought for him as the film's director. 'Mel was totally aggressive,'

says Cornfeld, recalling a meeting with Freddie Silverman of NBC, at which Brooks was hoping to raise several million dollars in pre-sale monies for the project; 'Freddie said: "Who is this David Lynch?" and Mel said: "That just shows what a fucking idiot you are!"' Cornfeld laughs when he remembers what happened when Silverman asked to read the script: 'So Mel says: "What the fuck do you mean, let you *read* it? Are you telling me that you know more about what makes a successful motion picture than I do?" I couldn't believe it. He wouldn't give the guy anything.'

Brooks sustained this attitude right to the end, even when it came to Paramount Pictures – the film's distributor. Again Cornfeld remembers the sparks: 'When the film was finally shown to Paramount, Michael Eisner and Barry Diller were there. They said "Gee, it's a great film, but we think you should get rid of the elephant at the beginning and the mother at the end." And Mel said: "We are involved in a business venture. We screened the film for you to bring you up to date as to the status of that venture. Do not misconstrue this as our soliciting the input of raging primitives." Then he slammed the phone down.'

For those who had taken *Eraserhead* to their hearts, it must have seemed unbelievable that when the name David Lynch next appeared it was on a movie peopled with a host of established British actors released through a major Hollywood studio. Eight Oscar nominations followed, but Paramount Pictures' other strong candidate, Robert Redford's directorial debut *Ordinary People,* stole both Best Picture and Best Director awards. *The Elephant Man* walked away with nothing. Brooks was to have his say about that too, as Cornfeld recalls: 'Mel's reaction the next day was "Ten years from now *Ordinary People* will be the answer to a trivia question. *The Elephant Man* will be a movie people are watching."'

As the Lady in the Radiator so sweetly sang: 'You've got your good things, and I've got mine.'

RODLEY: *After you'd completed* Eraserhead *you said that you could never make a film that way again. What exactly did you mean by that?*

LYNCH: I wouldn't want to take five years again. But to have enough money to work slowly and sink into that world, and work with a very small amount of people and really get into it, because it's so pleasurable – I would still love to work that way. I would *love* to work that way.

On *Lost Highway* I sat down with one of the producers – Deepak Nayar – and said, 'How come we need all these people?' And he said, 'David, we'll go through everything. You tell me who we don't need.' And we went through everything calmly, and there wasn't one person that we didn't need. The only problem with all this around you is to be on your guard. There's the scene right there, but around you is a lot of stuff that's

not. But it's all in your vision, so you've got to keep your eye on the doughnut and not on the hole. If all the crew on *Eraserhead* wore little black suits like Henry, or were dressed as plumbers like Mary's father, and they lived in that world and they moved slowly and were quiet, it would help me out a lot. But when you see one thing happening over there, and an opposite thing – something modern and wrong – over here, it's disturbing. It's not really as nice as it could be.

Once Eraserhead *had established itself on the circuit, did you start getting calls?*
Well, the reception of *Eraserhead* wasn't very good, so I had no other propositions. I got one call from this guy Marty Michaelson, who became my first agent. He loved *Eraserhead* and was with the William Morris Agency. I had lunch with him and he said he wanted to represent me. I was working on the script for *Ronnie Rocket* at the time, and he tried to help me get that thing going. It didn't happen, but he did a lot of work trying.

As urban myth would have it, you're a man of habits. Around this time, you're supposed to have haunted Bob's Big Boy Restaurant every day. Is that true?
Yeah. I was into Bob's halfway through *Eraserhead*. Each day at 2.30 p.m. I'd have several cups of coffee and one chocolate shake – a silver goblet shake. I discovered that sugar makes me happy and inspires me, so I would get onto a sugar jag and create on the napkins. Try to get ideas. I got so wound up that I had to rush home and write. I'm heavily into sugar. I call it 'granulated happiness'. It's just a great help. You know, a friend.

How long did your love affair with Bob's last?
Eight, nine years. The end of *Dune* was pretty much the end of Bob's.

Was there a period when you then started to read other people's material?
Yeah, but that didn't happen for quite a while. I just had this fixation on *Ronnie Rocket*. And then I realized that something was wrong – I wasn't going to be making a movie.

Did any of the major studios call? They usually get round to it, sooner or later.
I got one call early on to come into a studio and, you know, talk. And in the talk they asked me what I wanted to do. And I told them I wanted to do *Ronnie Rocket*. And they said, 'What is it about?' Since I don't like to

say too much about something, especially when it's something strange or abstract, I told them that basically it was about electricity and a three-foot guy with red hair. And a few more things. They were very polite, but I never, you know, got a call back. [Laughs.]

What is it about?
It's about the absurd mystery of the strange forces of existence.

What else were you doing at the time, besides writing?
I was building sheds, and whenever you can build a shed, you've got it made.

That's probably a very personal thing, I'm not sure!
Well, they're small houses and they can be used for storage, and they can be used for little places to be. As soon as you capture some space and design how the shape of it is, moods start occurring, light starts playing on the wall, and just to see it happening is unbelievable! [Laughs.] I like to build things, and I like to collect things. And when you collect things, you need a place to put them. I built a very elaborate little studio shed out of found wood. But you never have the right tool for the job, and that's always been a frustration. I wish I could build everything on my movies, but that would take for ever. Like *Eraserhead*. But I'm such a frustrated shed builder!

My landlord, Edmund Horn, was also a collector of wood. He was a very strange guy. He was a concert pianist and travelled with Gershwin. He started playing when he was three – a child prodigy – and he came out here in the thirties to California and started buying up real estate because he had all this extra money. So he became a very eccentric millionaire, and he would walk everywhere he went and he would dress like a bum. The bum in *Eraserhead* is wearing one of Edmund's sweaters, filled with holes. And he would shave his armpits with rain water! He would watch colour TV in his kitchen at night under the light of a forty-watt bulb. Every other light in the house was out. He was a *real* miser, and he would collect wood from trash around and he developed, over the years, huge piles of really good wood, which I talked him into letting me use for my sheds.

And then my paper route took me through two different zip codes and Wednesday and Thursday nights, say, were trash night, and people throw away a lot of good wood. And to me a stick of wood was like a stick of gold, it was so expensive. I had a rack on my car four feet by eight feet and I had tons of rope so I'd just strap it on and off I'd go. It was hard for me

to stop, because I'd try to get my route down to under one hour, but all this wood was extremely important. I could plan to build things with what I had. Since then, all my sheds, Edmund's house and my little bungalow in back have been bulldozed and it's just a vacant lot.

Eraserhead was a very particular experience – a long shooting period, a tiny group of people. But now you had the problem of 'what's next?'
Well, it was easy, you know. It was gonna be *Ronnie Rocket*! I was out of the Centre, and *Eraserhead* was playing, but I don't think I'd seen any money from it. I kind of forget how long it was before Stuart Cornfeld called. But I literally went round the house repeating his name: 'Stuart Cornfeld. Stuart Cornfeld. Stuart Corn-feld'. And it made me happy. Looking back now, I can see why.

How did you eventually get together on something?
Stuart and I had lunch, because he just wanted to meet me. He worked for Mel Brooks and he loved *Ronnie Rocket*, so he tried to help me get it going. But it just wasn't happening. So one day I called him, and I said, 'Stuart, I've reached the point where I know that *Ronnie Rocket* isn't going to happen. If you know of some scripts that I could direct, could you help me?' And he said, 'I'll get some things together and take you to lunch.' We went back to the same place: Nibblers on Wilshire. And we were sitting at this table and we got to this certain point where I said, 'OK, Stuart, what have you got?' And Stuart said, 'Well, I've got four things. The first one is called *The Elephant Man*.' And a thing went off in my head. And I said, 'That's it!'

Without knowing what that meant?
Only the title. I knew nothing, and yet I knew everything. In that one instant. And then he proceeded to tell me that there was a script and this guy Jonathan Sanger had optioned it from these two guys who wrote it, and they were looking for a director. Well, the team of me, the writers, Jonathan and Stuart, we went to six different studios and it got rejected at every one of them. And not only did we get rejected, but there were other *Elephant Man* scripts floating around. And suddenly it was, like, I couldn't turn a corner without hearing something or seeing something about *The Elephant Man*.

Then Stuart gave the script that Chris de Vore and Eric Bergren had written to Anne Bancroft. Anne read it and loved it and gave it to Mel Brooks. Mel read it and loved it. And so the first thing that happened was

'What have you got?' Freak show entrepreneur Bytes (Freddie Jones) in *The Elephant Man* (1980).

Mel decided to make *The Elephant Man* as the first film of his new company, BrooksFilms. The second thing that happened was he said, 'Jonathan's in, Chris and Eric are in and, Stuart, you're in, but who is this David Lynch?'

So they told him about this film *Eraserhead*. Mel had heard of it because it was on that marquee. But he'd never seen it. So they set up a screening, and that was horrific. The chances of me doing this picture after Mel sees *Eraserhead* are like . . . there's *no* chance. But anyway, Jonathan said, 'Mel wants to see *Eraserhead*.' And it just got worse and worse. The meaning of this screening became like, you know, pretty big. And so I go over, and again I can't see anything, I can't feel anything. I'm just there suddenly, you know, outside this theatre. And I don't remember anything except these doors opening. Jonathan came out and he didn't look like he was dead or anything, he just had one of those O.J. Simpson jurors' expressions. You just couldn't read it. And then the doors flew open and Mel advanced very quickly to me with his arms outstretched – almost running! And he embraces me and says, 'You're a madman, I love you! You're in.'

And then, on top of that, Mel just started talking about *Eraserhead*. And you know, I only knew Mel as a comedian but this guy is pretty amazing. He's one sharp, sensitive cookie. All the way through the making of *The Elephant Man* he was completely aware of what was happening, and how it was happening. Not only did he give me my big break, but he supported me in a way that I've never had since.

Cornfeld was later responsible for getting David Cronenberg involved in The Fly, *also made for Mel Brooks's company. That turned out to be Cronenberg's most commercial success, and without being compromised on any level.*

Exactly, right. Really, really, great, scary stuff. Stuart also played a big part in my life. And he called me out of the blue, which is strange, you know. A phone call can be an amazing thing, because the voice is not even coming through air so much, it's right against your head.

What's Cornfeld doing now?

I don't know. I probably should call him to find out what I'm doing next! [Laughs.]

How come you've never worked with Brooks again?

It's just how things worked out. He sent me a couple of things he wanted me to direct, but whereas *The Elephant Man* made that thing go off in my head, these others, for one reason or another, didn't. Afterwards I could have maybe directed *Frances* – the story of Frances Farmer – because Chris and Eric went on to that, and Jonathan went on to that: it was the same team. In a way I would've liked to have done that, you know, but it wasn't lighting my fire then.

You said The Elephant Man *was turned down at a number of studios. How did Brooks get it going?*

He made it happen. It wasn't any of us. But Pauline Kael played a part in that. Chris and Eric and I had an office right across from Mel's office at Fox and we wrote another script under his tutelage. We spent maybe two months, you know, working, writing every day. That script was sent to Paramount. And Pauline Kael had a gig there – because of Warren Beatty or something. She would read things, and advise on them. And I think, when she was leaving her post, she said, 'If you make anything here at Paramount, make *The Elephant Man*.' And I guess this one guy read it over a weekend, and was really moved by it. And so it became a Paramount film.

Presumably there were no more questions after Mel had said, 'This is the package.'? There was no one at Paramount saying, 'Who's David Lynch?'

There might have been, but one good thing about Mel is that he had so much power and he just said, 'THIS IS IT.' Mel was completely in control of the whole film. He could say, 'I'm going to give David 100 per cent control' or he could say he wasn't. There were no studio people telling Mel anything. From the very beginning he let me make the film. I was protected. When we finished the film a lot of the people at EMI wanted to re-cut it, and Mel told them what they could do.

What didn't they like about it?

They didn't like any kinda dream thing. They wanted to fiddle with it. They can't leave things alone. They want to worry. There are many things to worry about with every film. You think, 'Well, maybe audiences won't go for this, or maybe they won't go for that. We've gotta cut it out.' But Mel was able to, you know, stop these things.

Was it necessary for you to do another version of Chris and Eric's script? Were there things in the script that you thought were lacking?

Yes. Chris and Eric's version had the essence of *The Elephant Man* in it, and that's what got everybody to fall in love with it. But it wasn't the same story. See, the whole thing came from this one chapter in Frederick Treves's book *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*. And this one chapter had some weird breeze of the essence of this beautiful soul. And it caught people, like that article that Cronenberg took out of *Time* magazine for *Dead Ringers*. You just can't leave it alone. You just know there's something bigger there.

Chris and Eric's script was very good, but so close to the real story that it started by going up and then it flattened out. We restructured the whole thing and wrote a lot of new scenes. The beginning and the end weren't in the original script. I learned a lot from this work, because I had never done this kind of thing before.

Is it possible to characterize what your contribution to the script was?

I don't know what I brought to it. I can't remember. What did Chris bring to it? What did Eric bring to it? There are the three of us sitting in this room, and it's like miles of tapes of conversation back and forth, and suddenly locking into something. It just takes a certain shape because of the people involved, so it's really a group effort. And Mel, too, had a lot to do with the script. Like the night porter role: Mel didn't feel it was strong

enough. It's one of those things where somebody says something and not only do you think they're right, but it gives you licence to go and do it, whereas before you weren't making enough tension out of something. So Mel said some very good things about the script that helped.

But it's a very different problem from Eraserhead, *isn't it? It's an historical story to be played by a top-notch cast, with emotions that are not necessarily* Midnight Movie *emotions.*

That's what was so amazing about Mel, somehow, from seeing me, and seeing *Eraserhead*, to come up with the notion that I could do this. And I'm not even 100 per cent sure he bought it himself in the beginning. But something happened to him.

And you can't take five years to make it. You're going to be on a schedule for the first time.

Yeah. The worst, darkest hell for most of it. But inside, you know. Inside it was a horrifying experience. One day I woke up in the morning and I was putting my underwear on, thinking, 'Today I'm going to go and direct Sir John Gielgud!' That's, you know, an absurd thing! Coming from Montana, ending up here, going to do that! And yet, in another way, it made some sort of sense. But it was horrifying.

Was working with Sir John Gielgud in England so very different from working with Jack Nance back in LA?

Every actor is different. But because Jack Nance was so sort of extraordinary on his own, he could work side by side with them, and they would appreciate him. To me the director's there to stop just that one line that, for some reason, is not correct, or could be misleading or something, or doesn't fit, or is not quite in character. The fact that it all passes through one person is the thing I think is important. And Sir John is like one of those kind of machines that, instead of one or two buttons, has got one or two thousand.

Was Gielgud receptive to the way you like to work?

This guy was a saint to me. And I loved working with him. He didn't work that many days, but I always say the same stuff about him. I noticed he smoked cigarettes that must have been made by a speciality shop – beautiful boxes, like hand-made for Sir John, you know. And they were oval-shaped. And so he'd light them and he'd hold them like this [gestures] but away from himself. When he wasn't smoking them – taking a drag – he'd

hold it back like this [gestures]. And the smoke would rush away from him. He never had one piece of lint on his clothing. *Nothing* was out of place. He walked in a certain way, talked in a certain way. The *cleanest* man I've ever seen! Ever! NO lint would come on him. It would come down and then suddenly it would arc off! And you want something changed in a sentence – a word – half of your sentence comes out through the air, he understands . . . and OK. Next time he does it, it's been subtly altered to fit your request. The tiniest adjustments. Same with Jack Nance. He would lock on to the concept and be able to get it to you like *that*.

But I worked with some of the very best people. And they didn't know me. Like Wendy Hiller. The first day she's on the set, she grabs me by the collar and walks me around the room, and she says, 'I don't know you. I'll

Lynch directs a lint-free Sir John Gielgud (as Carr Gomm) and Anthony Hopkins (as Frederick Treves) in *The Elephant Man* (1980).

be watching you! And we'll see!' This kind of stuff. I saw a certain humour in it, but at the same time you've got to win them over, you've got to win their respect, for you to say things to them. They've been around the block so many times it isn't *funny*.

I'd only made *Eraserhead* and, coming from Missoula, Montana, to London, England, to do a Victorian drama with the best of the best was pretty tough. This punk shows up, this whacko and, you know, if they *weren't* nervous there would be something wrong with them! It was fantastic but I *never* was not nervous and I never felt safe.

Did you have a programme: 'How am I going to impress them?'
No, no, no. You just have to dig deep. It's like a role that has been given to you, and you have to do it. It's like putting one foot in front of the other. Eventually, you're gonna get there. And that's the way it was.

Could you tell when you started to win, when they became sure of you?
In the middle of it. You get a kind of an indication here, an indication there, and you just dig deep and hold on and do what you think you have to do to be true to those things. But you can never let up. In his book Frank Capra talks about how Glenn Ford stopped him making movies. He had so much trouble with him, and he said he wasn't strong enough to fight the fight. An animal knows when another animal gets weak, and it was a *horrible* thing for Capra. It was the end.

But these days it's possibly even worse. If you want to do a picture with one of the big box office stars, you're going up against real force.
Yeah, they got script approval, casting approval, you name it – final cut! [Laughs.]

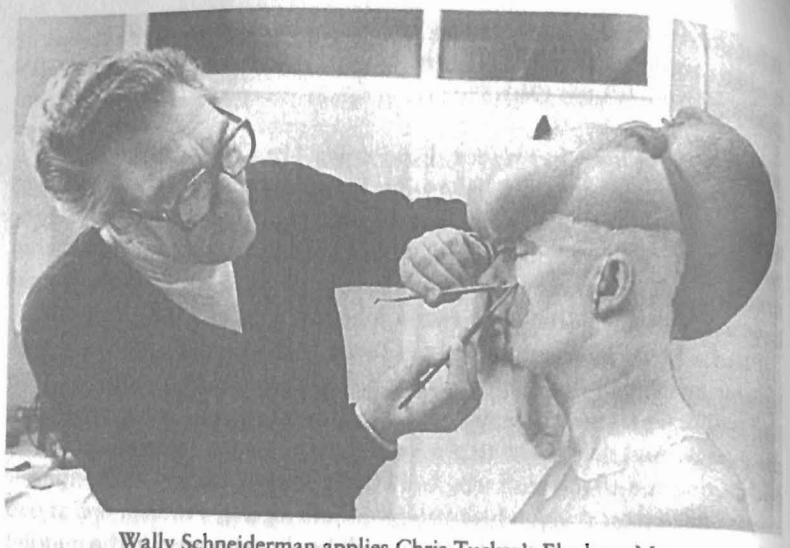
I suppose John Travolta walking off Polanski's The Double *and the picture then falling apart, demonstrates just how powerful actors have become – even 'reborn' ones!*
Yeah. John owes it to the history of cinema to listen to every *doggone* thing Roman Polanski says! The world is ass-backwards. John may have 90 per cent of the role perfect, but for the 10 per cent – he's gonna need some talking to and he's gotta be open. Maybe it's a subtle little thing, but you work together. And if that doesn't happen, it's part John Travolta's picture and part Roman Polanski's picture. Then, what if the music guy comes in and writes a bunch of stuff that, you know, doesn't relate to anything? If you're locked into that, you've got a *joke* coming down the tube!

What do you think about directing big box office stars yourself?
It's like carrying a live hand grenade. It might not go off but, if it does, it's gonna get you. It's too risky.

What was your main trepidation about doing The Elephant Man*?*
The worst trepidation was before the film even started, because I was going to build the elephant man's make-up. I had an idea for a suit which would look really organic, and wouldn't require five hours of make-up time every day. It wasn't just a suit. It was layers of stuff, and it would have needed some 'blending' between John Hurt and the suit every day.

I had a house in Wembley and the house had a garage, and the garage became my studio. And I built this thing. I don't know how much time we had before we started shooting, but I'd been working for several months in the garage. And then I'd go to production meetings and location scoutings and casting and all this stuff too. And I had a concept for this make-up. But it was one of these things where two people are digging a tunnel, one at one side of the mountain, one at the other, and they hope to meet in the middle! This was, like, it wasn't going to happen. And I brought John Hurt over one day and started putting this thing on him. And even as I was slipping it on his head, even before it got there, we both knew that it was, like, maybe a million miles away from happening. It wasn't that it looked wrong, but the material – instead of being flexible – was like concrete! And there was no way John could move in this thing. There was *no way*! And so he said something like, 'A valiant effort' or something like that. And at that point, you know, it could've gotten ugly. But I'll be forever thankful to John that he never said one negative thing about what I was trying to do.

It was like those 'Four Dark Days' following Kennedy's assassination. I had the same number of dark days. It was so bad that I would go to sleep and have nightmares. And, you know when you wake up from a nightmare, how thankful you are? Well, I would wish I could go back into the nightmare! Because it was *worse* being awake! And that's the only time I really considered suicide as a way to stop the torment. Because I couldn't crawl out of my body, and that's what I wanted to do – I wanted to be somebody else, crawl out, and not have knowledge of that other person. And I couldn't get out of my body. I couldn't ever eat right, sleep right, move . . . I was *dying*! Twenty-four hours a day. Mel had heard that the make-up didn't work and was flying immediately to London. But he couldn't come for two days, for some reason. So, meanwhile, Jonathan got some names and stuff and Chris Tucker's came up. And Chris put me down for assuming that I could do this. Rightly so.



Wally Schneiderman applies Chris Tucker's Elephant Man make-up design to John Hurt.

Hadn't he seen Eraserhead *and the baby?*
That's neither here nor there, because who knows what effects I did on that? But I'm sure he hadn't. Anyway, Chris Tucker and I became good friends. By the time Mel came, I was so sure I was going to be sent packing, and it was going to be over. And all Mel said was, 'Thank God for Chris Tucker!' and 'David, you should've never tried to do that, you've got enough to worry about, directing the picture.' And that was the end of it. No more problems. And so Mel saved me again. But because of the make-up going wrong, Chris needed a certain amount of time. And so we had to reorganize the schedule. Everything turned out in the end, but it was humiliating and, you know, it just added that much more to a job that was already gonna be difficult. But I did invent a neat thing – the skin. A skin that moved, and I still want to fiddle with that some time. But I didn't know enough about materials to do what I needed to do on top of someone's skin. This stuff that Chris uses, you can close your eyes and hold a piece of this in your hand and squeeze, and someone could take it out, and you could squeeze again, and it would be the same experience. It's so light! And so *moveable*, that it's not there. It's amazing stuff.

Did the overall design and effect of the make-up change as a result?
Here's what happened. By this time we'd gotten to know Mr Nunn at the

Holding back the horror. Frederick Treves (Anthony Hopkins) shows John Merrick to his own audience in *The Elephant Man* (1980).

London Hospital, and he had the actual plaster cast of the elephant man, taken right after he died. They also have his head and an arm and a foot cast in plaster. They used to have all his internal organs in jars, but during the Second World War a bomb hit and those jars were broken. And so, for the first time since the elephant man died and they cast him, that head left the London Hospital and went to Chris Tucker's studio. And Chris could take John Hurt's head and John Merrick's head and work the two out. So it's completely authentic. It's exact.

The revelation of John Merrick's face and body is held back in the movie for some time. What was the thinking behind that?
That was really Mel who wanted to do that. See, when Tony Hopkins goes and sees him, I showed more, and then re-cut it to show less. I think that the compromise was to show something, because otherwise I felt that people would start looking at it too much like a horror film. But Mel was right too that, more and more, you want to see him, and so it was a delicate balance. So we see him for the first time with nurse Norah. That works because hers is the normal reaction and possibly the reaction of the audience too. The

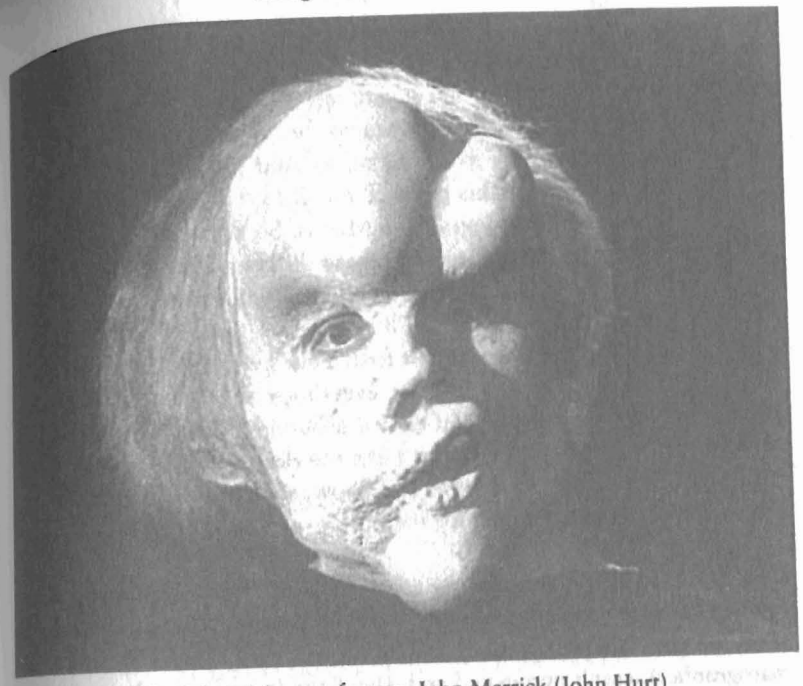
problem is that you get used to knowing what's been taken out, and your mind isn't as pure as an audience's any more, and so it's really tricky.

You've said before that specificity of place is about an accumulation of detail – something we'll return to with Twin Peaks. *What were your initial impressions of England and London?*
Well, London is like LA, in a way. There are many different places in London. And so I loved it. I understood a certain English thing, you know, but for the film I was getting inspiration or ideas from books of London more than from London itself, because every place I went, it wasn't *The Elephant Man* territory. Then one day I was walking around a derelict hospital and suddenly a little wind-like thing came and entered me, and I was in that time – not only in that time in the room – but I *knew* that time. It filled me with a knowing and therefore a confidence that couldn't be taken away from me. I knew what it was like then, and it came out of that hospital. But it was more than the hospital. Maybe it was the photos, maybe it was a bunch of things coming together, but from then on I had my take on what I thought it was. More than anything, it gave me a confidence.

Do you mean like in The Shining? *The idea that architecture isn't just bricks and mortar, it's . . .*
. . . a recording instrument. I'm sure that's right. And that's what was happening to me. It was just unravelling and I was picking it up.

Isn't that a nerve-racking business, because if you don't get that sense, then where are you?
You don't deserve to say anything. Unless you have, somehow, through some gift, that kind of knowledge, you're not allowed to say anything. If you take someone else's script, for instance, my first reaction is, 'Why don't you direct it? You wrote it.' I would have to see it so strongly for myself. It would have to ring so many bells to become my own. And I'd have to then get permission from this person for me to make it my own before I went ahead. Because you're going to be talking to actors, and the actor could say, 'Wait a minute, let's go find the writer and see what the hell he meant.' You gotta really own it, and know it somehow.

But then somehow, through all this anxiety and fear and doubt, you're still able to direct The Elephant Man.
Yeah, something got through.



Beautiful soul, human factory. John Merrick (John Hurt) in *The Elephant Man* (1980).

What kept you going – kept you close to the idea?
I'll tell you what kept me going, and that was pretty much John Merrick – the character of the elephant man. He was such a strange, wonderful, innocent guy. That was it. That's what the whole thing's about. And then the Industrial Revolution. Or you see pictures of explosions – big explosions – they always reminded me of these papillomatous growths on John Merrick's body. They were like slow explosions. And they started erupting from the bone. I'm not sure what started the explosion, but even the bones were exploding, getting the same texture, and it would come out through the skin and make these growths that were slow explosions. So the idea of these smokestacks and soot and industry next to this flesh was also a thing that got me going.

Human beings are like little factories. They turn out so many little products. The idea of something growing inside, and all these fluids, and timings and changes, and all these chemicals somehow capturing life, and coming out and splitting off and turning into another thing . . . it's *unbelievable*.

Did Brooks intervene much in post-production, once the film was shot?
No. I made a couple of trips in post-production to show Mel the film. He must have liked it because he would tell me. One thing I was really worried about was getting to use *Adagio for Strings* at the end, because John Morris was slated to do all the music. And John Morris did a great job, but I just had to have this piece of music. And in order to get it, I had to sell it to Mel, and Mel loves John Morris. So we were forced to have this screening where Mel invited all these different people and I had to screen both versions, one with *Adagio for Strings*, and one with John Morris's music for the end. And I'll give you a piece of advice: always screen the version that you like best first. That's what we did. Afterwards there was silence, and so I thought everybody was going to vote, you know. But after this silence Mel turned around to John Morris and said very kindly, 'John, I gotta tell you I like the *Adagio for Strings*. It works better for the picture.' And John, you know, said, 'Fine.' But it's not like I'm winning. It's like winning for the film.

Elephant Man was nominated for several Oscars. From Eraserhead *to the heart of the Hollywood 'community' with one picture. What was that like?*
Well, we got eight nominations and didn't win one! Freddie Francis (cinematographer) wasn't nominated and Alan Splet (sound) wasn't nominated. I remember hearing about the nominations, but I didn't hear Freddie's name so I called him up and we kind of commiserated a little bit. But it was like going from zero to sixty in no time. It didn't really register, you know, how rare a thing that was. And in America they all thought I was British. This woman listed the nominated directors and said, 'The young British director, David Lynch.' Stuff like that. They didn't know anything about me.

At the Oscars nobody knows who's going to win, but everybody does know, because you can feel it. Everybody knew Robert Redford was going to win for *Ordinary People*. So you just can relax and enjoy the experience. It was a *great* feeling, but I knew it had nothing to do with me. I was just doing the same stuff. You just realize that what happens to a film is so much out of your control. It buoys you up some, but now you're looking to go down the other side.

It's obvious that to many directors, success – in the sense of public recognition – is very important. How do you view the whole business of success?
I think, for me, it's more like respect for the work. That, to me, is success. All the other things make me feel completely dishonest. It's really against

Donald Sutherland and Mary Tyler Moore: Paramount Pictures's *Ordinary People* (1980).

Freddie Jones and John Hurt: Paramount Pictures's Extraordinary People (1980).

the reasons why you do stuff. Money is really great only because of what you can do with it. So I really want to have some money, so I can do more things. Sometimes, when things are going well, you can get even more money, but that's not the reason you do it. That's a beautiful sideline.

But Los Angeles and Hollywood are driven by a hunger for money and success.
Yeah, and you can feel it when you're on the outside. You can feel it, walking into a restaurant – if things are happening for you or not happening. Everybody in this town knows what that feeling is. And everybody in this town knows that when you're on top it's not going to be for ever. It's almost like a curse. *Twin Peaks* was the thing that made everything more public. And *Blue Velvet*. There's so much publicity surrounding a picture, and your photo is out and around for the couple of months that the movie is running. And then it goes away. It's like a merry-go-round.

Would you prefer not to be involved at all in that side of the business?
Definitely. I think some people really like it. I would like to have the film go out, but not me go out! And I think you should stay as uninvolved with what happens to it as possible. It's like going to college with your children, you know? You've got to let them live their life, and not make excuses for them, or whatever. Help them out, slip them ten bucks, you know, here and there, and tell them not to go with that girl. Just send them out and go about your work. You should really be like a monk. I haven't quite got that down. There must be some part of me that is weak, and it's like dancing towards a flame. It is a weakness, in a way. [Laughs.]

Are you saying that you think there's a spoiling element about success?
You bet! It's a dangerous, dangerous thing! It plays tricks on you, and it can make you a really ugly human being. Or it can be just what you need to heal certain things and make you relax and be able to really do what you're supposed to do. Successes are complicated things, psychologically.

But isn't it important to you to know that people out there are enthusiastic about your work?
Yeah, but then your mind starts thinking *about* that, you know? Then you might start getting a bunch of ideas that are so different. It'll make you second-guess them. And you'll say, 'Now I'm cooked.' But you can't not hear these things people say about your work, so it doesn't matter.

You could go and hide in your workshop.
But you're going to turn the radio on! Failure's the only solution!

But if someone were to say to you that they thought you were *really successful, what would you say?*
I'd say, 'What have you been smoking?' [Laughs.]

5

Oww God, Mom, the Dog He Bited Me

Photography and *Dune*

If *The Elephant Man* was a surprise development for Lynch, both in its scope and its success, *Dune* turned out to be a shock for all concerned. It stands as one of contemporary cinema's most striking examples of the chaos that can ensue when worlds collide: when personal vision meets mega bucks, small meets large, naivety meets reality and private meets public. Admirers of Lynch were dismayed to see the auteur literally consumed by the machinery of epic cinema and the demands of the 'event' picture. Even as press releases boasted of the synthesis of Lynch's 'artistic' vision and Dino De Laurentiis's no-expense-spared blockbuster, the director was stranded somewhere on one of eight gigantic sound stages in Mexico City, lost among the 1,000-strong cast and crew.

Originating in a vast, unwieldy novel, *Dune* must have seemed a daunting challenge from the moment it was mentioned. Lynch is clear about the various elements in the story that attracted him – not least of which seems to have been the character of Paul Atreides, the sleeper who must awaken (shades of both Lynch and Henry?). What finally convinced him to take the job is harder to say, though Stuart Cornfeld has his own theory: 'I think David had spent enough years dealing with being a broke artist and living through the nightmare of "This is never going to happen for me." It's tough to return to your own art when it has failed to deliver you in the way that interpreting someone else's did – as happened with *The Elephant Man*. And then you've got Dino saying: "I'll give you a blank cheque for the production . . . " Who knows what David's life was like, going from zero to that.'

Despite the sleepless nights Lynch had experienced on *The Elephant Man* he took one step further into the darkness. This time, however, the three-year struggle that was *Dune* ended in personal nightmare. For those who knew him well, Lynch's belief that he could make *Dune* work probably came as no surprise. Peggy Reavey remembers the occasion when, while they were still both art students at the Academy in Philadelphia, Lynch thought he could build a perpetual motion machine and went to the Franklin Institute to tell them so. 'He'd just go straight to the top and tell people: "I think I know how to build a perpetual motion machine. I'm an art student." Einstein couldn't do it, of course. But he was utterly earnest. And this guy very nicely explained why his plan wouldn't work and we trooped out and had a cup of coffee.'

That was before the perpetual motion of *Dune*, from which Lynch – by now a very anxious sleeper – finally did awake. In so doing, he clearly decided his

course from then on: that he would never again relinquish his right of final cut, and that he would return to his own neighbourhood. As Mary Sweeney, Lynch's editor, producer and 'sweetheart' of many years, observes: 'He's wisely shy of big budgets, because of *Dune*, but also because he's a modest person. He likes to feel that he can have his artistic freedom without being beholden to people who have invested too much in him.' Friend and screenwriter Robert Engels believes: 'He would never go overground again. He's *the* independent film-maker. *The* maverick. That's his niche. If they thought they could get him to do *Guns of Navarone* they would, because you'd get a different take on the same old story. But David doesn't want to do the same old story.'

Given the recent success of 'director's cut' versions of movies that have, for one reason or another, fallen foul of studios, producers and censors, it's tempting to imagine a reconstituted *Dune* exactly the way Lynch originally envisaged it. Even in its present form, the film is not only ravishing to look at and clotted with nasty Lynchian delights, it slyly prefigures *Blue Velvet*: what is going down in Lumberton if not a Holy War of cosmic consequence?

It's interesting to note that during the *Dune* débâcle, Lynch began to exhibit his most private work – his paintings – and also came up with *The Angriest Dog in the World*, a four-frame comic strip that ran for nine years in the *LA Reader*, and which features a tethered dog that is *so* angry it can barely function. Stranger than fact.

Lynch was also developing his interest in photography, and had by now produced a number of striking industrial landscapes and a series of humorous photographic 'kits'. In displaying the insides of various creatures, Lynch not only evoked the slippery, intestinal qualities of *Eraserhead* but also expressed his continuing love affair with pure texture.

RODLEY: *As well as continuing to paint, you also became more involved with photography around the time of* The Elephant Man *and* Dune. *Why was that?*

LYNCH: One of the things I like about photography is the machine of the camera. It's really a fantastic thing. Everyone who's ever taken a picture gets a *thrill* when it comes back from the lab. It forces you to *see* that moment but in a different way. And sometimes, usually because of some screw-up that you didn't count on, it really jumps and becomes a magical moment. Again, you're not completely, 100 per cent, in control. There are a lot of processes, and I like these processes, because there are more opportunities for accidents.

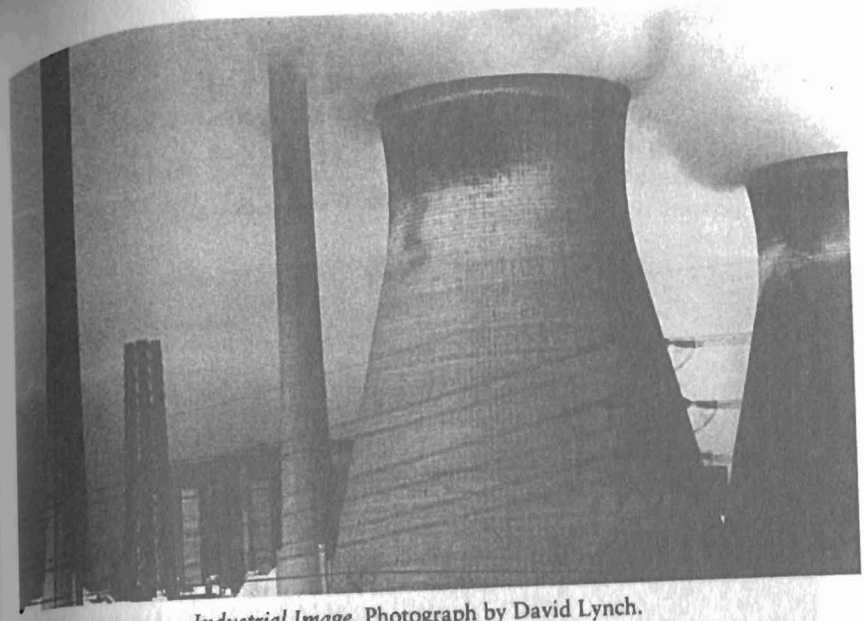
What I find interesting about your photographs of industrial landscapes is that they are completely de-peopled. And yet there is the sense that people

built these structures, and that others – also unseen – may be working away inside them. Was it simply easier not to have people present?
I wouldn't have probably liked people to be in them. A lot of those came out of location scouts for films, like when I went to northern England with Freddie Francis for *Ronnie Rocket*. It was a great trip, but I'd missed the real stuff by at least ten years, maybe even more, and so it was a horrible trip at the same time. All these great old factories were being replaced by these little plastic and aluminium structures that had zero visual power. And there was no smoke, no fire and no soot. I really wanted to go on this trip, but it was just pleasant countryside and fragments of these factories that were abandoned and derelict. So a lot of those places don't have any people around them. But they're great because they were old and nature has gone to work on them so they were rotting – like corpses.

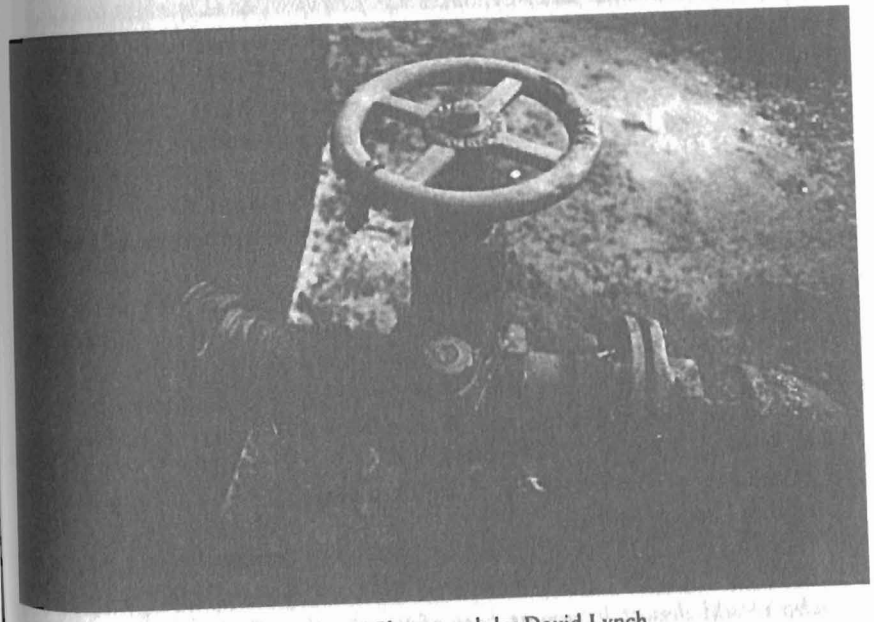
What really fascinates you about factories and industry?
It's the power, I think. It makes me feel good to see giant machinery, you know, working: dealing with molten metal. And I like fire and smoke. And the sounds are so powerful. It's just big stuff. It means that things are being made, and I really like that. I got into that a little bit with *The Elephant Man*. Now it's computers and robots building everything. It's cleaner, smaller, more efficient.

Is there any modern architecture that impresses you?
I like Bauhaus: that kind of pure, formal thing. I like grey rooms that have nothing in them except a couple of pieces of furniture that are just right for a person to sit there. And then, when the person sits there, you really see the contrast, and then the room looks very good and the person looks very interesting. Architecture is *really* the most fantastic thing. A house has got to have a roof of some sort, and windows to let some light in, but it's amazing how few are successful as buildings. The ones that are, just stand out because you just can't believe how beautiful it is to be inside them. But the little mini-malls and postmodern stuff – they're *killing* your soul.

You also made some other photographs around this time called Fish Kit *and* Chicken Kit, *in which these creatures have been cut up and displayed in a humorous way.*
Yeah. That idea came from model airplane kits, where you get a box and you take out the parts and you have to read the instructions and assemble them. And then, when you're finished, you have what is on the cover of the box. I was married to Mary Fisk at the time and we were in post-



Industrial Image. Photograph by David Lynch.



Industrial Image. Photograph by David Lynch.

Children's Fish Kit (1979). Photograph by David Lynch.

production of *The Elephant Man* in England. Mary went back to America, and I had an apartment in Twickenham, and the day she left I went out and bought a mackerel and took it home, cleared off this table and cut this fish up. I labelled all the parts and arranged it like you would if you opened up a kit box. And it tells you stuff, like to put it in water when it's finished! So that was my first Kit.

Then I did *Chicken Kit*. That was my most advanced work in the Kit department! I got into a lotta things with that one, like there was a note that told you the feathers were not included – with a lot of kits you have to buy extra stuff. It's a rip-off. And then there were instructions about how to put the feathers in – not the soft, fluffy end, but the more pointed, harder end. [Laughs.] Really dumb stuff! Some of it was in Spanish and some of it was in English. It was pretty crazy. I did that when I was making *Dune* in Mexico.

These photographs make me think of the British painter, George Stubbs, who would dissect horses as part of his practice of understanding and depicting them.

Right. Well, it makes you think about things like, 'What makes this thing work?' If you put them all together, you'd have a 'chicken', but what makes it walk around, you know? And peck at bits of gravel? Pretty weird.

I made *Duck Kit*, but my photographic exposure was so bad you couldn't read the instructions: it was all too dark. Then I was all set to do *Mouse Kit* on *Blue Velvet*. I had about twelve mice in my freezer, but I never did the kit. The house was a rental, so I'm sure the landlord found them. I want to do larger animals, but I've never had the chance.

Dune was an expensive, epic, big-effects picture. How and why did you get involved in it?

Well, that's a whole other thing that took nearly three years of my life. I was working on *Blue Velvet* at the time, which kinda got derailed. I was still thinking about it, but this executive at Warner Brothers hated the script so much. When you're waiting for ideas to come, you don't know how long it's gonna take. And I knew it wasn't working. I was in this space where I was trying to catch ideas to make it work.

And then a weird thing started happening. I went to meet George Lucas who had offered me the third *Star Wars* to direct, but I've never even really liked science fiction. I like elements of it, but it needs to be combined with other genres. And, obviously, *Star Wars* was totally George's thing.

I got onto Thomas Harris's *The Red Dragon* with Richard Roth, who was gonna be the producer of *Blue Velvet*. And then I kinda got turned off that. And about that time Dino De Laurentiis called the house. And Dino says, 'I want you to read this book, *Dune*.' I thought he said 'June', you know, and I said, '"June"?' He said, 'No, *Dune*.' And so then a friend of mine said, 'Man! That is a great science fiction book,' and I said, 'I know, that's what I heard.' So I started reading it.

Why do you think Dino De Laurentiis thought of you for the film?

Dino was interested in me because of *The Elephant Man*.

He may have seen The Elephant Man, *but had he seen the more personal* Eraserhead?

When Dino and I first talked, he had not seen *Eraserhead*, so there were a lot of things in my head that he didn't know about. When he finally saw the film, in fact, he hated it. In some ways I knew I'd have to hold back. For one thing, the film had to be a PG. You can think of some strange

things to do, but as soon as they throw in a PG, a lot of them go out the window. And, you know, I kinda like to go off the track, to go off in a strange direction, but I wasn't able to do that. But there are a lot of little things that are strange and exciting and which inspired me. I thought about waves – water waves, sand waves, wave motions, symbols, repetition of shapes, connecting threads.

What did you think of De Laurentiis?
Dino was very different from how I expected – charming, warm and very persuasive. We discussed the concept, and I was convinced the novel could be adapted to film.

It's very easy to say that Dune *is less a David Lynch film than any of your other movies, but there are many similarities between this sprawling sci-fi epic and the worlds of Henry in* Eraserhead *and John Merrick in* The Elephant Man, *aren't there?*
Yes. Some sort of connecting thread. Machinery is predominant in all of them. I like factory people, steel, rivets, bolts, wrenches, oil and smoke. Industrialization is never a central theme, but it *always* lurks in the background. It's depressing that America's smokestack industry is dying, and sad that there is so little machinery in *Dune*. Industry really impressed me as a kid. Living in the Northwest, I never really saw a big city. When I visited New York, the contrast was so great that I felt a surge of power every time I went near a city. Life is a matter of contrasts. If everything is noisy and a bomb goes off, you're only mildly affected. But, if it's quiet when the explosion hits, then you're really affected. That's my love-hate relationship with the city.

Also, all three movies feature strange worlds that must be built and filmed to be entered. I want to make films that occur in America, but that take people into worlds where they may never go; into the very depths of their being. I'm influenced by places and the people I've met in those places. They make such a mood and say such a thing, and I'll get a feeling that I can't escape from. Millions of times a day it will happen. But I did end up in Philadelphia at a special time in my life, and that probably affected me the most. I started falling in love with industry and flesh. No one has gotten the power in cinema that I feel there is in industry and factory workers, this notion of fire and oil. To me factories are symbols of creation, with the same organic processes as in nature.

However, the worlds of Eraserhead *and* The Elephant Man *are small – sometimes microscopic.* Dune *– even in novel form – creates a big, potentially unwieldy universe of several worlds. How did you deal with that initially?*
I had a lot of talks with the author, Frank Herbert, concentrating on every line in the book. There are so many things in it that seem to contradict themselves as you get into it. And there's many confusing things in it. Many strange bits of information, technology, and mythology. And it's like – where's the story, you know? The more you get into it, the more it's hard to hold on to. But I was way down the line before I started having these feelings. I really went pretty insane on that picture.

Didn't you also work on subsequent Dune *scripts? Follow-ups to the original?*
Yes. Dino had got me on a deal. In the contract I had to do two other things or something. And so I wrote half of a script for the second *Dune* movie. And I actually liked that one. I never finished it, but I really got into it because it wasn't like a big story. It was more like a neighbourhood story. It had some really cool things in it. I was getting going on something and it seemed to be sorta talking to me. But *Dune* was a fiasco and there weren't any more wanted.

Was it always your intention to write the script for the original movie?
I was going to work with Chris de Vore and Eric Bergren from *The Elephant Man*. But Dino didn't like what we were doing. I may have liked where we were going but I kinda saw it wasn't going to happen that way, and I was going to end up in the middle of these two different *Dunes*. So I just told Chris and Eric it wasn't working out. I felt they were pretty upset with me. We were in sync in some ways, but they wanted to go in different directions. Other aspects of the novel were more important to them. If they had done the picture, my ideas would have clouded their vision. A writer is like a filter: the ideas pass through his personal artistic screen before they hit the paper. *Dune*'s notions came from Frank's book, but I interpreted them.

I started working on my own, and it was another one of those things where the train was going too fast. I'd be writing and then we were going location-scouting, and going to see Dino in Italy. You know, going here and going there. One of the years on the picture was spent on the script, with me, or me and Chris and Eric.

You said that Mel Brooks was helpful in the process of getting The

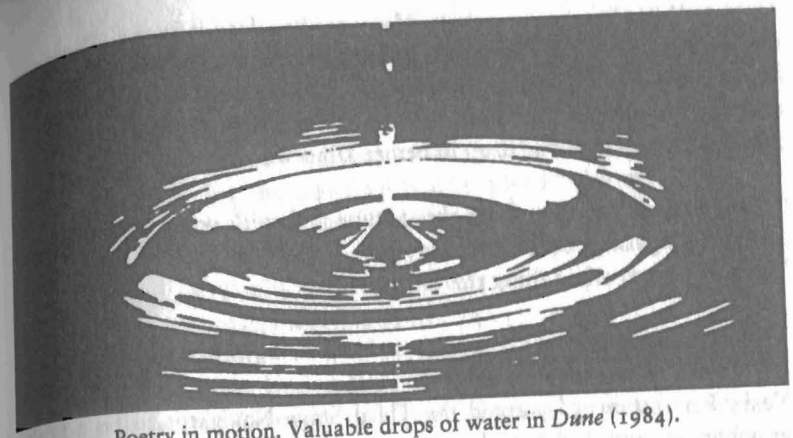
Elephant Man script right. Was Dino De Laurentiis any help in getting Dune *onto the page?*
Dino was my editor. He helped shape the script. It was difficult to cut because artists fall in love with their work for aesthetic reasons, but you have to pare it down for practical reasons. Battles were won and lost; the 'folding space' sequence was one I fought for. But I was so close to the work that I relied on Dino as a sounding board to find its weak points. And he did! And eventually we boiled it down to 135 pages.

The most difficult thing was being true to the whole thing. I couldn't reduce it to the point where the story's essence was lost. It's very dense with action and levels of interpretation. So the rule I used to shape the script was common sense. I just let the work talk to me. Certain elements in the book added up to *Dune*, and I put those in the script and they continued to add up to *Dune*. So I used that method for every problem.

If it's possible to say, what characterizes David Lynch's Dune?
It was the character of Paul: the sleeper who must awaken and become what he was supposed to become. Frank Herbert is a really good guy. A *really* good guy. Very like Barry Gifford. They write the original book, but in a very honest way they say, 'Take it and run.' And you say, 'Really?' So you test them a little bit. With Frank I could have maybe gone further, to get a little bit more of what I like in there. Factories and rubber and some industry going, instead of long, flowing robes and that medieval sort of feel.

Baron Harkonnen looks and feels like one of the truer Lynch touches.
Yeah, but he's sort of like that in the book. But not. His world was much closer to the other worlds in the book, as I remember it. So I was able to get going there. And then there was a kind of a poetry to many of the things in it that were abstract, but were really cool. But they didn't have a lot to do with any story, and they needed time. I shot a lot of stuff like that: the water-drops underground, and the ceremonies and things they did and the way they lived, the way that the Water of Life was made from a baby worm. They could be told without words.

But because they made me make the movie two hours and seventeen minutes long – that was the maximum length at that time – a mound of stuff had to go. And the rest of the stuff had to go into a garbage compactor to push it together. You'd have a line instead of a scene and the line would be in voice-over. It's not a way to go.



Poetry in motion. Valuable drops of water in *Dune* (1984).

In what sounds like a developing chaos, how hard was it to keep a fresh eye on the film – despite the daily disappointments?
That's the hardest thing there is. The closer I get to finishing a movie, the more I start projecting my fears onto it. Not only have I seen it over and over, I start seeing where I've made mistakes. I see my fears double-exposed with the images on the screen. And it just keeps getting worse until I can't stand being in the editing room. I can't see it. I just see fear and horror. And I'm, like, insane now, at the end of the film, and I'm not even acknowledging my predicament. I'm doing a mental thing to be free from it. And so I really don't even remember finishing the film.

To hear what people were saying about me after *Dune* could have completely destroyed my confidence and happiness, and you need to be happy to make stuff. I was almost dead. Almost dead! But because of *The Elephant Man* they couldn't discount me completely. If I'd just made *Eraserhead* and *Dune* I'd have been cooked! *Dune* took me off at the knees. Maybe a little higher.

Did the necessity to compress the film give birth to the device of constantly hearing what people were thinking?
Well, a lot of it was meant to be in the film but, like, 40 per cent of it was added on to nail things that they thought people would not understand. It can be a beautiful thing – to hear thinking. It's a nifty thing, but when it's just for information, you smell a rat.

There was so much material and room for development that it could have made a great TV series – like Twin Peaks.

That would've been a great thing. You could've done it justice. There was a poetry to a lot of the stuff: the atmospheres, the rituals – sand. The water being saved down below in these places. And the thrill of the little water-drops, with certain sounds and a certain light. Those things are mesmerizing, but I got maybe one drop in before Dino was, you know, on me!

The most non-Lynchian thing about Dune *is that it's not a neighbourhood story. It's a galaxy, not just two blocks.*
Yeah. I got into a bad thing there.

Was it possible for you to have much of an influence over the special effects and creatures?
Yeah. For instance, I wanted the Third Stage Navigator to be a fleshy grasshopper and I did a drawing for Tony Masters, the production designer. Tony took that drawing and augmented it in the details and then Carlo Rambaldi built it. I have a theory about Carlo Rambaldi: he always builds himself. And so, somehow, the Navigator looks to me a little bit like Carlo Rambaldi. And ET looks exactly like Carlo Rambaldi! So it passes through many people on the way to becoming what it is.

Knowing that you usually involve yourself a lot in designing your movies, what about the mega-design of Dune?
Although I didn't design each individual prop, I was actively involved in creating a certain look. For instance, once a component for the Spacing Guild Navigator sequence was built, it had a logic that dictated how the other structures should look. Caladan, the water planet, supports large forests, so the entire Atreides castle was built from hard wood carved with strange patterns. And its society, which is like a military organization, uses weapons made of wood and metal. In contrast to that, Arrakis is a dry planet, so we designed all sorts of stuff for desert survival. My personal favourite was Giedi Prime, the oil planet. We used steel, bolts and porcelain to construct that. Frank described many of the settings in the book, but we still had lots of leeway. We developed a concept for each planet, and every structure, you know, conformed to that. Unfortunately, many objects actually built didn't end up in the film.

At one point, Dino and I went for a trip into Venice. He took me into St Mark's Square, but by a certain route and at a particular point. Every time you see something for the first time . . . if you could just remember that! I got the idea then that Venice would be a big influence for *Dune*. So I talked to Tony Masters, and things developed from that.

He had eight huge sound stages to build on, and we filled them twice over: the equivalent of sixteen sound stages of sets! And they were so close together that Freddie Francis, the cinematographer, said we'd have to shoot them as if they were locations. There was no way that you can treat them as sets. They all had roofs but no windows so they were *not* friendly to the DP at all. But the craftsmanship involved! Mexican technicians work in this wood that comes from the rainforest that everybody's so upset about. I mean, they had *really* great wood. Even the backs of the sets were works of art. *Really* unbelievable. Just to wander through and go into these different places was a fantastic trip.

Despite the critical reaction to Dune, *and your own obvious disappointments with the way the production went, what are the things you're most proud of in the film?*
Well, I never carried anything far enough for it to really be my own. I had the feeling that Dino and Rafaella wanted something, and then there was Frank Herbert's book, and trying to be true to it. So you're already locked into a specific corral. And it's hard to break out of that. I didn't really feel

'The sleeper who must awaken.' Paul Atreides (Kyle MacLachlan) wanders through carved wooden splendour in *Dune* (1984).

I had permission to really make it my own. That was the downfall for me. It was a problem. *Dune* was like a kind of studio film. I didn't have final cut. And, little by little, I was subconsciously making compromises – knowing I couldn't go here and not wanting to go there. I just fell, you know, into this middle world. It was a sad place to be.

Do you think that Dino's original ambition, to make it more about people than hardware, emerged in the finished film?
Well, it started out that way. It was a blend of technology and human emotions. And there were some interesting characters. But there were so many of them that it was very hard to get them all into one film. If you had a mini-series or three or four films, you could really get into it. What made them do what they did? When you push it all together, you just get the surface.

Rafaella De Laurentiis must've been very clear about what you would bring to it?
Yeah, but the thing is I'd done two films, *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*. *Eraserhead* was a no-no, and *The Elephant Man* was good. I don't know if they would say it, but I think that's the way I got *Dune*. Like, 'We

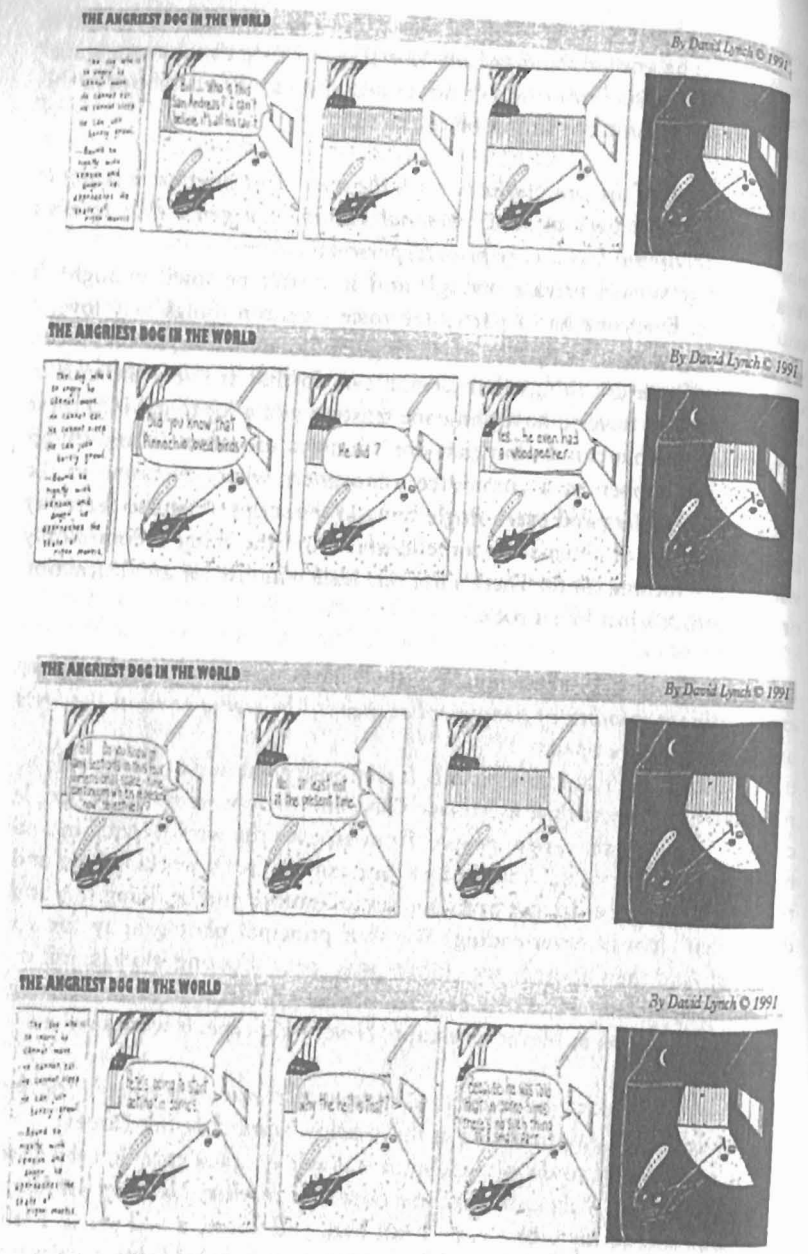
Technology meets human emotions. Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (Kenneth McMillan) and The Beast Rabban (Paul Smith) in *Dune* (1984).

gotta watch David. If he goes in the direction of *Eraserhead* we're dead in the water! If he goes in the *Elephant Man* direction, that's what we want.' But I've got a lot of *Eraserhead* things in me, and I saw possibilities in this material. So, of course, I had to be restrained.

Even so, much of the pre-publicity took the line: 'This director is going to bring to bear his very private, personal vision on a genre that doesn't normally accommodate a very private, personal vision.'
Yeah. But it wasn't private enough and it wasn't personal enough! It couldn't be. Everyone has a particular voice – certain things they love, a way of doing things. The problem is being left alone to do it, so that it can come out. There are things that cinema can do that are very difficult to talk about. You have to have someone trusting you a lot to get into these things that cinema can do but that don't happen too often. Those things could never happen in a committee atmosphere where everyone in the room has to understand every single thing in the script. It gets so far away from the magic of cinema it's *unbelievable*. And the thing becomes only what it is. Nothing more. There's not one little window for an abstraction or a dream. It's just like a rock.

Being for the first time on massive sound stages with many sets and an extraordinary number of people, what was it like trying to keep the lines of communication open?
It was insane, but not uninteresting. It was both great and horrible, side by side. We had a great time in Mexico City, and there were so many people coming in all the time, new people, from all over the world, flying in and being part of this thing. And we had four camera crews working here and there, and you'd be driving from one set to another and be doing this and doing that. It was never-ending! We shot principal photography for *six months*! And then another six months was spent shooting models, miniatures and special effects. Every day, day in and day out, living it and talking it, and working on it. Never an escape. Never an escape. It was massive.

Was it more than a coincidence that the weekly comic strip you did for the LA Reader – The Angriest Dog in the World – *started during* Dune?
No. It had nothing to do with it. But it was *not* a coincidence that the year *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* came out they cancelled *The Angriest Dog*. That was sort of my worst year. I just had, you know, a bad smell! I tell you, I couldn't get arrested in that year – '92 was *it*, man! Some stars were drifting! You just watch it happen, and you can feel it. It's the weirdest



The Angriest Dog in the World (1983–92). Drawing and text by David Lynch.

thing. Just like we can all feel when things are going well, we can feel when they're going poorly. It's like that line: 'And this too shall pass.'

The graphic for the strip never changed over its nine-year life: always the same four frames of the dog in the yard. Only the speech bubbles differed, from week to week. Did you create that original graphic?

Yes. I did that in '83. And then every Monday I had to think up my 'dog' and phone it in and the *LA Reader* would write it into the speech bubble. So the writing changed over the years. Some of them tried painstakingly to copy my original writing.

Where did the idea come from?

It came from anger. [Laughs.] I don't know, it just came to me that this dog was so angry that the tension and anger caused him to approach the state of rigor mortis! He could barely growl, you know? Just *tight*! Bound so tightly! And where is this anger coming from? There's no real narrative, you could start in the middle and go any whichway. Bill and Sylvia live in the house – you kind of get that. In one of them Sylvia says to Bill, 'My psychiatrist says you have an anal personality,' and Bill says, 'That asshole? What the shit does he know? I'll tell him to stick it up his butt!' [Laughs.] Nine years of that! Not all of them are that good!

Were there ever any longer, 'director's cut' versions of Dune*?*

There was a much longer version that we screened in Mexico City. It was either four and a half, or five hours and fifteen minutes, or something like that. But it wasn't a final version. I don't even know if it was everything, because we were still shooting and putting stuff together. It was a work-print picture with all the effects missing. That's the only long version that existed.

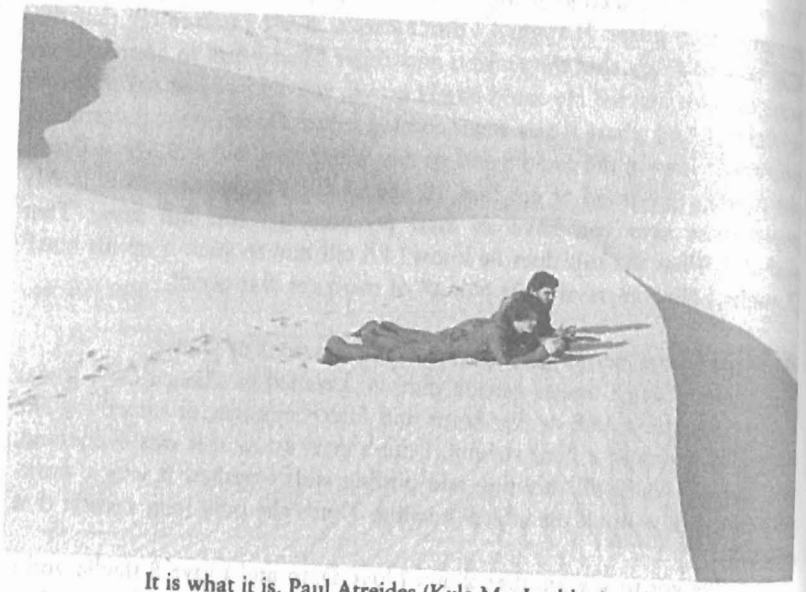
But I've got to say another thing: I love Dino and I love Rafaella and I loved working with them. We were like a family. I just know the way they are and they know the way I am. We loved each other in spite of it. And so I don't blame them, I take it on myself. It's a delicate thing. They're very strong people and I knew the way they were. I let that influence the film too much. It's a lesson.

But surely, when a movie costs so many millions of dollars, any director knows that it's going to be difficult to maintain a power base, and to expect all manner of pressures from 'above'?

Where there's money involved, there's always tension and worry. The

more money, the more worry. And you can understand that. The best attitude for the money people would be, if you're going to make a film with this director, sit down at the very beginning and talk enough so that you feel good about whatever it is. Then go with them and support them; see it through to the very end in that spirit. It gets tougher and tougher towards the end because, in the beginning, it can be anything. And in the end it is, you know, what it is.

Although, in a way, Blue Velvet *was the pay-off from* Dune. *A very good pay-off. From personal hell to a beautiful cinematic hell.*
Yes, exactly. So it balanced out, I guess.



It is what it is. Paul Atreides (Kyle MacLachlan) and Stilgar (Everett McGill) in *Dune* (1984).

6

She Wasn't Fooling Anyone, She Was Hurt and She Was Hurt Bad

Music and *Blue Velvet*

Personal and professional redemption rarely manifest themselves as clearly and triumphantly as they did in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. The mainstream/commercial phase of *The Elephant Man* and *Dune*, which had prematurely refracted some of the strange promise emanating from *Eraserhead*, was evidently over. For many, *Blue Velvet* stands as Lynch's most satisfying and successful movie to date: the perfect synthesis of his own very particular aesthetic and thematic obsessions, with the more traditional demands of narrative movie-making. At turns shocking and exhilarating, it became the second indelible film experience to be manufactured by Lynch, and remains a prominent feature in the landscape of eighties American cinema.

Returning home from Victorian England and the far reaches of deep space, clutching some valuable lessons from the trip, Lynch was back on personal ground with *Blue Velvet*. He has remained a home boy ever since. But now the forces of good and evil were even more polarized. Achieving equilibrium – central to both Lynch and his characters – never seemed more difficult, painful or necessary.

In some ways *Blue Velvet* marked a new beginning for Lynch. During the making of the film he was introduced to composer Angelo Badalamenti. Now an indispensable member of Lynchland, Badalamenti has been responsible for nailing much of Lynch's imagery firmly to the mast of the unforgettable with his gift for the melodic and melancholic. He also helped to musically liberate Lynch himself. Their partnership was to produce two albums with singer Julee Cruise, the performance piece *Industrial Symphony No. 1*, and that rare thing – movie soundtrack albums that survive the cinematic experience.

Lynch might in any case have proved to be contemporary cinema's most astute director when it comes to using 'found' music. Having renewed the medium with his dense, experimental approach to sound, he also introduced the imaginative and dream-like power of pop and rock to celluloid. Not only are his images transformed by the sounds and sentiments of the music, but these images in turn re-invent the music itself – twisting its meaning or complicating its often simple, emotive intent until the two become inseparable. In *Blue Velvet*, with scenes such as the one in which Dean Stockwell sings Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams', Lynch finally unlocked this talent to startling effect.

The movie also liberated his fascination for sex as the site of domestic trauma, fear, power and – on occasion – euphoria. This again seems to have

been a concern derailed after *Eraserhead*, a film seen by some commentators as founded on sexual anxiety. Given that such concerns were conspicuously and necessarily absent from both *The Elephant Man* and *Dune*, and that since *Blue Velvet* they have defined many of Lynch's narratives and characters, Lynch's mainstream phase can be seen as a period of arrested sexual development for his cinema.

The sexual extremities of *Blue Velvet*, and the power with which they were delivered to an audience, inevitably resulted in a degree of public outrage and moral confusion – perhaps exacerbated by the fact that the film was undoubtedly an extraordinary piece of cinema, and one that functioned in a completely different universe from those of the cheap exploiter or the slick, cynical, 'high concept' movie. Indeed, *Blue Velvet*'s evident 'artistry' was often cited as the very reason for its reprehensible or dangerous nature. It became a 'position' movie.

In approaching *Blue Velvet*, and the part of nightclub singer Dorothy Vallens, Isabella Rossellini points to aspects of Lynch rarely discussed in the heat of such debates: 'A lot of people thought it was sick, but for me it always represented the research in David of the good and the bad. He's quite a religious person. Quite spiritual. Any person who is religious is always trying to define these things, which are always so elusive. I think that's the core of his film-making.'

Her own interpretation of Vallens's sado-masochistic nature is of interest for its basis in certain 'real' situations – something she never discussed in detail with Lynch. 'In my mind she was a battered woman – someone who perhaps had Stockholm Syndrome. But you can't play that literally. David's films are more of a sensation than a story. They're not anthropological or psychological researches into character. They're surreal impressions. Things are very transcendental. *Blue Velvet* has to do with a profound moral dilemma. That's why the story is surreal. Dorothy masks herself because she is afraid of what she looks like. She's shy and hates herself. The wigs and the make-up and everything was because she wanted to look like a doll – perfect – to hide her madness. The more she becomes a victim *not* to elicit sexuality, the more she *does*. I played her that way: everything she did turned out to be something she didn't mean!'

RODLEY: Blue Velvet *was the first of your movies that showed how essential music – rock, pop and contemporary – is to the worlds that you want to create. It's been an important organizing factor in all your subsequent work, and you also began writing lyrics during* Blue Velvet*'s production. Do you remember when this passion for music started?*

LYNCH: Oh, absolutely. The exact moment. It gets dark, you know, very late in Boise, Idaho in the summer. It was not quite dark, so it must've been, like, maybe nine o' clock at night, I'm not sure. That nice twilight,

and a beautiful night. Deep shadows were occurring. And it was sort of warm. And Willard Burns came running towards me from about three houses down the street, and he said, 'You missed it!' and I said, 'What?' and he said, 'Elvis on *Ed Sullivan*!' And it just, like, set a fire in my head. How could I have missed that? And this was the night, you know. But I'm kind of glad I didn't see it: it was a bigger event in my head because I missed it. But I felt this was, you know, the beginning of rock 'n' roll for me – around the time Elvis really appeared.

It was happening before that, of course.

It had been happening but now it was locked in.

If you didn't really start to express your interest in certain kinds of music until Blue Velvet, *what was happening before that?*

Before, I was frustrated, and I think a lot of directors must be because you rarely get to sit down with the composer until late in the game – post-production. You meet him, you tell him what you want, he sees the film, comes back with the score, and there's no more time: you're mixing. And if it doesn't work, you don't have time to fiddle and to make it work. A lot of music just gets overlaid over sequences and it's the composer's sole interpretation of what you've done. And it may or may not marry. Sometimes it's painful to see what happens. It's better to pull it out. A scene might work better with no music.

A lot of lyrics in pop and rock music – particularly of the fifties – are deceptively simple and naive: girls and boys falling in love, being abandoned, etc. Your own lyrics seem to echo or mimic those concerns.

Yeah. All of it was simple, but it's not what you're saying, it's the way you say it, and how it works as a texture against a bottleneck guitar. How you slide from one note to the other can be one of the coolest, most incredible things you ever heard! It's unbelievable when it works, and to do that you've got to know so deep in yourself where you are and what it is. It's like High Art. And those guys *know* it. And then you get a guy like Pat Boone. He's doing everything, and it's a million miles away from working, you know? I mean, he's a nice guy, I'm sure! But somehow, between him and Little Richard there's nothing to talk about!

I've always assumed that 'In Dreams' was conceived as an integral part of the movie from the beginning. It seems conceptually essential to the story's intentions and mood. Is that true?

'In Dreams' came about while we were in production for *Blue Velvet*. Kyle MacLachlan and I were on our way down to Wilmington, North Carolina, from New York City. We were going through Central Park on our way to the airport when over the cab's radio came 'Crying' by Roy Orbison, and I'm listening to this song and I said, 'That! I've got to get that for *Blue Velvet*. When I got to Wilmington I sent somebody out to get Roy Orbison's greatest hits. I played 'Crying' and then I played 'In Dreams', and as soon as I did, I forgot 'Crying'. 'In Dreams' explained to me so much of what the film was all about. I immediately called Dennis Hopper and told him about the scene I had in mind and that he had to memorize this song. Dennis and Dean Stockwell are old friends. Dean got together with Dennis to help him work out the song and memorize the lyrics. I wonder why! [Laughs.] So we finally got to the day we were going to shoot the scene in Ben's apartment where Dennis was going to sing the song. We were rehearsing and Dean said, 'I'll stand here and kind of help Dennis if he needs it.' So we started playing the music and both Dennis and Dean began to sing 'In Dreams'. All of a sudden Dennis stops singing and looks at Dean – who's continuing to sing. Dennis is solidly in character and he is moved by Dean's (Ben's) singing. There was the scene in front of me. It was so perfect.

Once it was decided Dean would be singing 'In Dreams', another strange thing happened. I was going to use a small candle-style table lamp as the microphone. Dean knew the microphone was going to be a lamp of some sort and when he went over to the area of Ben's apartment where we were going to set the song, thinking he saw the prop light, he picked up a work light that was hanging on a nail on the wall. He turned it on and flipped the long cord like a microphone cord and obviously it couldn't have been more perfect. The strange thing is no one on the crew put that work light there. No one knew where it came from. Who can say how it happens?

The use of 'In Dreams' in that scene revived Roy Orbison's career, but what did he think of the movie and the use of his music in it?
When Roy first saw the movie he didn't like it. His song 'In Dreams' meant another whole thing to him, and it was, like, a precious thing. I think some people he respected must have gotten him to see the movie again and reconsider his feelings. Roy told me that when he saw the movie the second time, he got past what the song was for him and then could appreciate the fact that it was working in another way.

'In dreams I talk to you.' Ben (Dean Stockwell) performs for Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

You've mentioned the power of original fifties records, but the version of 'In Dreams' in Blue Velvet *isn't the original recording, is it?*
It is the *original* recording of 'In Dreams'. It is the original recording of 'In Dreams' in *Blue Velvet*. Most definitely the original.

Bruce Springsteen once said that Orbison's voice sounded like it came from another planet, and yet it seemed to understand human suffering only too well. What is it about Orbison that attracts you?
It's the voice and all that was behind it. And then it was the dark glasses which I guess came about later. The glasses seemed to change his kind of shy, stilted performance style into something super cool.

Apparently, Orbison's eyes stopped developing when he was twelve.
I didn't know that. That's like with Alan Splet, you know. When you have one sense impaired, others jump up. Al could hear things that others couldn't.

What about your use of Ketty Lester's 'Love Letters' in Blue Velvet? *Again, it seems to have a conceptual function.*

Yes. That was lyric. And the groove was fantastic! For a long time I knew I was gonna use that song. This idea of the love letter fed into Frank. Popular phrases can have different meanings, but for him it's always the darker meaning. He twists things. Love becomes putrefied to the opposite degree.

Very few directors really understand how to use contemporary music in film; Wim Wenders and Martin Scorsese immediately spring to mind as exceptions – perhaps because they clearly love and value the actual sounds. Wenders even made an early short devoted entirely to a comparison of Bob Dylan's version of 'All Along The Watchtower' with Jimi Hendrix's.
Well, everybody and his little brother can get a song and cut it into the movie. What's cool to me is when the song is not only an overlay. It's gotta have some ingredients that are really digging in to be part of the story. It could be in an abstract way or it could be in a lyric way. Then it's really, like, you can't live without it. It just can't be another piece of music.

Blue Velvet *is the first time you worked with someone who has since become a very important collaborator and essential component of what we think of as 'Lynchland': musician Angelo Badalamenti. Did you always intend to hire him to score the movie?*
No. Not a bit. That happened because Isabella Rossellini had to learn the song 'Blue Velvet'. She was going to sing it with a local club band, so it wasn't too professional. Just like a regular club. I figured, if I had a club band, that it would all live together and be fine for 'The Slow Club' in the story. She had got a teacher in Willmington – a woman who played the piano while Isabella learnt the lyrics and phrasing. But it was the wrong version.

So we ended up in this recording studio and it became painfully obvious that it wasn't working. And so the producer, Fred Caruso, turns to me and says, 'David, since this isn't working, how about if I call my friend Angelo?' And I was thinking, 'What makes you think that if we call your friend, it's gonna be any different? Let's keep trying.' And so we tried some more, and he said, 'Look, I can get Angelo to come down here and work with Isabella, and you just tell me if you think it works. It won't cost anything.' And, finally, I said, 'OK.'

So, very quickly, Angelo comes down, but I didn't meet him. Isabella was staying at this small hotel that had a lobby with a piano in it. So at ten o'clock in the morning or so, Angelo gets together with Isabella, and they begin working. Around noon we were shooting in the Beaumont's back yard, and I remember Angelo walking down the path, and I've got a hair

Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) performs at The Slow Club in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

of a chip on my shoulder, maybe, because this guy's supposed to come down here, and Fred says he's gonna do this and do that. So Angelo says, 'We did a tape this morning with Isabella, and it is what it is. Listen to it.' So I popped on these headphones and Angelo's playing the piano and Isabella's singing. And I took off the phones and said, 'Angelo, we could cut this into the movie right now – it's so *beautiful*! It's fantastic!' And so Angelo had done his job.

Watching some footage shot during the making of Blue Velvet *I realized that a track you used while shooting the movie – Tim Buckley's 'Song to a Siren', performed by This Mortal Coil – was missing in the finished film. It's very similar in sound and mood – very melancholic – to your work with Angelo and Julee Cruise.*

Exactly. They were asking a lot of money for the track, and we didn't have any money. At one point Fred Caruso said, 'David, you're always writing little things. They could be called lyrics. Why don't you write something and send it to Angelo and he will write you a song?' And I said, 'A song to take the place of *this* song, out of millions of songs, this *one* song that I *have* to have, Fred? And you're telling me to write *lyrics* and give them to Angelo, and this is going to solve my problems!' Anyway, I did write these things, and I thought, 'Well, since Isabella's going to go up there to record "Blue Velvet", there's nothing to lose. I'll give them to Angelo and talk to him and see what comes from it.'

So Angelo wrote 'Mysteries of Love'. At first it wasn't what it is now: same melody, same words, but it had a completely different feel. So I talked to him, and then I started falling in love with this thing. And he got this friend of his – Julee Cruise – to come in and sing it in a different way. And I could see it working. And I said, 'Angelo, why don't you score this picture?' I wrote the script listening to Shostakovich, so I told Angelo about that, and Angelo starts going to work. And he scored the picture.

I love Angelo so much as a musician and as a person. He was getting me to send lyrics and we'd sit and work together, and it was so much fun. And he didn't mind me saying things. He *liked* me saying things. And so I'm, like, in seventh heaven. I'm in a recording studio, which is the greatest place, and I'm with musicians, who are the greatest people in the world – the *greatest* people. They sleep late, they're like children, and they have this unbelievable thing that they don't talk about. They just do it. It's a thing that brings all different kinds of people together. And now, without saying anything, they're really together, making this music. It's a *magical* thing! You can do anything. You just have to say what you want. It's the

best! A *major* event! Angelo brought me into the world of music. I didn't realize how much I wanted to go there till that happened.

When these bits of writing suddenly became song lyrics did you feel self-conscious?

Yes. I did. It's like painting. You start some place and hopefully you get better. Angelo gave me the chance to start. If he lived next door, I'm sure we'd be working all the time, but he lives in New Jersey and I'm in LA, so it's hard for us to get together. Music opens up doors, because even one little sound or a sequence of notes can give you an idea for a story.

When Marguerite Duras made India Song, *she played music on set to help the actors perform in the right way – to wander around in a kind of somnambulistic state. This is something you do often now, isn't it?*

Yes. I always have the music in the headphones with the dialogue. The actors aren't hearing it, but I am. But they all get a tape of the music, and they listen to it whenever they want. And I play it out loud in rehearsals. But having it in your phones you can judge that much more whether things are correct or not. Even if that isn't the music you're going to end up using. It just gives you a great indication.

There's a wonderful scene in Twin Peaks *with James, Maddie and Donna where James is playing a juvenile love song on the guitar. The entire song is played in real time while the audience waits for something to happen and nothing does. It's just that song.*

Right. But something does happen. It's a cliché scene, in a way, but in a million living rooms people get together and they noodle around and they play something for somebody else and there's nothing like it. In that scene, there was an undercurrent of one girl looking at another girl looking at the boy, looking at her.

What impressed me about the scene is that, even though it might have a dramatic function, it recognized the goofy adolescent love and pain in the music: that the sentiments it expresses do have value, in terms of the characters.

Yes, exactly. I agree 100 per cent. It's meaningful. In a living room or in a bedroom or something like that. Girls lying around . . . It's fantastic stuff!

A lot of the music in your movies has a fifties feel to it. The guitar seems to be used that way. Is that right?

Music, love and the whole damn thing. James (James Marshall), Maddie (Sheryl Lee) and Donna (Lara Flynn Boyle) make home entertainment in *Twin Peaks* (1989).

Yes, it's a fifties thing. Banal in a way. But it's kind of removed from that also. Misplaced, almost. A fifties/nineties combo was what *Twin Peaks* was all about. We weren't making a period thing.

Did Bobby Vinton's version of the song 'Blue Velvet' inspire the movie?
It was the song that sparked the movie! Bernie Wayne wrote that song in the early fifties. I forget who sung it first, but it wasn't Bobby Vinton. But Bobby Vinton's version was the first one I ever heard. I don't know what it was about that song, because it wasn't the kind of music that I really liked. But there was something mysterious about it. It made me think about things. And the first things I thought about were lawns [laughs] – lawns and the neighbourhood. It's twilight – with maybe a streetlight on, let's say, so a lot of it is in shadow. And in the foreground is part of a car door, or just a suggestion of a car, because it's too dark to see clearly. But in the car is a girl with red lips. And it was these red lips, blue velvet and these black-green lawns of a neighbourhood that started it.

So the film had to be shot in colour?
It had to be in colour. And so the question was: what kind of colour? And

since I love black and white so much, we experimented with de-saturating the colour towards black and white. But the closer it got to black and white, the less I liked it. And the more it got towards thick, rich, saturated colour, the better I liked it. So we went that way.

Apparently, having a thing about velvet is a recognized and documented condition.
It's a real fetish? I didn't know that. I know it is for me. I always carry a little piece around. [Laughs.] But a lot of those things are common sense. Different textures are always appreciated by people. And then there's always those people who appreciate them just that little bit too much! I can see how it could be a fetish for someone.

At what point did all the elements and inspirations for Blue Velvet *come together?*
There wasn't really one point. I started getting these ideas for it in 1973, but they were just fragments of interesting things. Some fell away, others stayed and began to join up. It all comes in from somewhere else, like I was a radio. But I'm a bad radio, so sometimes the parts don't hook together. It took a long time for *Blue Velvet* to emerge. I needed some new ideas and finally, when they came, it was obvious, but they weren't there for a while.

Do you use any techniques, 'tricks' or ways to help gel an idea when you're writing?
Sometimes I like listening to music, or reading technical manuals. Something like that. Or scientific or metaphysical things can trigger ideas. I wrote the script to Shostakovich: No. 15 in A major. I just kept playing the same part of it, over and over again. Sometimes just going out into the street and seeing a building or something makes all the difference. You have to expose yourself to different things.

At what point did you start to try and raise interest and money for the project?
When I finished *The Elephant Man* I met Richard Roth, the producer of *Julia*. He took me to lunch at the same Hamburger Hamlet that Al and I went to that day we quit the AFI, and told me he had read my script for *Ronnie Rocket*. He'd liked it but, truly, he said it wasn't his cup of tea. He asked me if I had any other scripts. I said I only had ideas. And I told him I had always wanted to sneak into a girl's room to watch her at night and that, maybe, at one point or another, I would see something that would be

a clue to a murder mystery. He loved the idea and asked me to write a treatment. I went home and somehow I pictured someone finding an ear in a field. This field was a field I remembered from Boise, Idaho.

Why was it an ear that Jeffrey had to find?
It had to be an ear because it's an opening. An ear is wide and, as it narrows, you can go down into it. And it goes somewhere vast . . .

Then Richard said, 'You gotta come with me and we gotta pitch this.' So we went over to Warner Brothers and pitched it. I went out of the room or something and this guy said to Richard, 'Is this a true story? Did he find an ear? Or did he make that up?' And Richard said, 'No, he made it up.' And the guy said, 'Jeez! I'll do it!' And so I wrote two scripts and they were *horrible*! And this guy at Warners who was excited at the beginning was screaming at me on the phone.

'Horrible' in what way?
They just weren't there. It was bad, you know. He hated them. There was maybe all the unpleasantness in the film but nothing else. A lot was not there. And so it went away for a while. Then it came back again after *Dune*. Dino asked me what I wanted to do next, and I said, 'I want to do *Blue Velvet*.' And he said, 'You have the rights?' I said, 'Yeah, I have the rights.' And then there was some discussion, and I said, 'Wait a minute!' I think I talked to my lawyer and a turnaround clause had lapsed and it had reverted back to Warner Brothers. And here's where Dino came in. Dino doesn't wait to make a phone call. That phone is *flying* off the hook! And he's calling the President of Warner Brothers and buying it back.

The early drafts were terrible, so I wrote at least two more. The fourth draft was almost finished, and I was sitting in a building waiting to go into an office in some studio. I don't even know why I was there. I was sitting on a bench and I suddenly remembered this dream that I'd had the night before. And the dream was the ending to *Blue Velvet*. The dream gave me the police radio; the dream gave me Frank's disguise; the dream gave me the gun in the yellow man's jacket; the dream gave me the scene where Jeffrey was in the back of Dorothy's apartment, sending the wrong message, knowing Frank would hear it. I don't know how it happened, but I just had to plug and change a few things to bring it all together. Everything else had been done except that.

Although you'd made Dune *for Dino De Laurentiis's company, how did he finally get involved in making* Blue Velvet?

My agent then was Rick Nicita at CAA and we were always going to visit Dino in the bungalow – or, as he says, 'boongalow'. 'Boongalow noomber nine' at the Beverly Hills Hotel. And most every time there was an official meeting. It was like going to the electric chair: I'd get the bad news or whatever – and I think somewhere in there came *Blue Velvet*. Dino knew that I wanted final cut but, like a great businessman, he used that to his advantage. He said, 'No problem, just cut your salary in half, and cut the budget in half, and away you go.'

Given the unhappiness you'd experienced making Dune, *was it immediately evident once you'd started shooting* Blue Velvet *that this was really happening: that this was how you liked to work?*
Well, Dino had just bought the studios in Willmington, North Carolina. It had maybe one sound stage, but he was busy building others. They put a concrete slab down and these walls and ceilings go up in a twinkling of an eye. They're not soundproof, and they're two miles from an airport. They're not sound stages at all. But we actually got one that was pretty good for *Blue Velvet*. Dino's company was going public and we were the littlest film and therefore the one that they didn't have to pay any attention to. And so there was a tremendous sense of freedom. After *Dune* I was down so far that anything was up! So it was just a euphoria. And when you work with that kind of feeling, you can take chances. You can experiment. You can really feel it. And I had final cut, which gives you another whole sense of freedom.

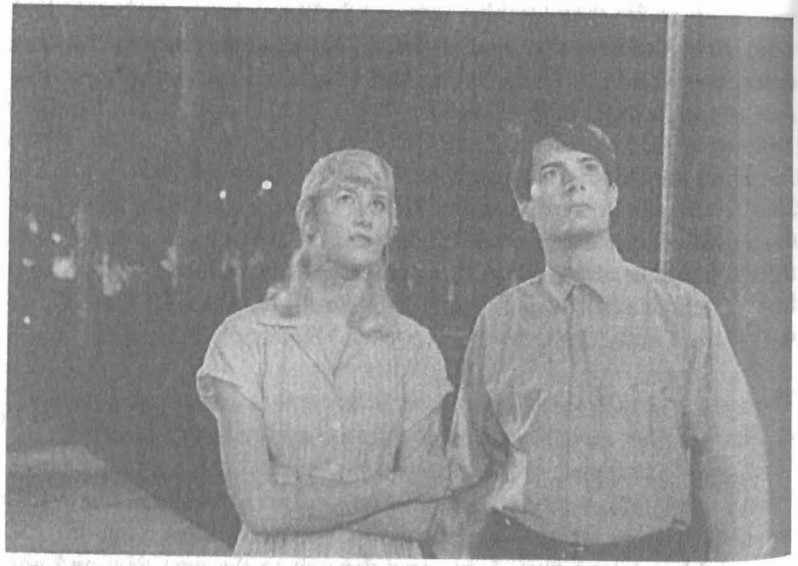
Did Dino bother you much once you'd started shooting?
No. He saw the first day's dailies. He just came in. And it happened that the lens was broken and we didn't know it. We were looking at the stuff for the first time and you couldn't even see it! Out of focus. Dark. So we had to reshoot the first day's stuff. And Dino says, 'DAVID! Why is it so dark?' and I said, 'Dino, the lens is broken.' He says, 'Oh,' and left.

The movie reminds me of Eraserhead *in that it feels completely sealed off, as if no one even went home after the day's work, or had the weekend off. How was that hermetic world achieved this time?*
I don't know. We were maybe in a bit of a dream all the time, but everyone goes home at night. I don't think that's so good. I just hope that the day's work is strong enough to carry through to the next day, and not break the dream. And that the actors will stay in that world, because then I think you do better work.

After The Elephant Man *and* Dune, *the movie also represents a return to more obviously personal movie-making – something you've stayed with ever since.*
That's true. It was back to a more personal picture.

The similarities between Eraserhead *and* Blue Velvet *go beyond just the personal movie though, don't they?*
Blue Velvet is a neighbourhood picture and, in a way, *Eraserhead* is a neighbourhood picture as well; it's just a different neighbourhood. They don't ever connect with the Government or Washington DC or world problems. Their problems are problems within a small area of the world, and a lot of the problems are inside the people themselves so, in that way, both films deal with similar things.

Blue Velvet *was the most 'realistic' film you'd made up to that point. It wasn't the highly constructed world of* Eraserhead, *it wasn't sci-fi and it wasn't Victorian England. It takes place in a recognizable, contemporary America, and yet it's resolutely non-naturalistic in places.*
It's like a dream of strange desires wrapped inside a mystery story.



Good times on our street? Sandy (Laura Dern) and Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) outside Dorothy Vallens's apartment block in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

But some of the dialogue, far from being naturalistic, seems either exaggerated in its naivety or ironic.
Well, it's only as naive as small-town America.

Another non-naturalistic part of Blue Velvet *is the opening sequence of shots: an impossibly blue sky, a pristine white fence, redder-than-red flowers, etc., through to the dark, wet insect battles beneath that beautifully green lawn.*
This is the way America is to me. There's a very innocent, naive quality to life, and there's a horror and a sickness as well. It's everything. *Blue Velvet* is a very American movie. The look of it was inspired by my childhood in Spokane, Washington. Lumberton is a real name; there are many Lumbertons in America. I had to pick a real town so we could get police insignias and stuff. But then the name Lumberton took off in my mind and we started getting lumber trucks going through the frame and that jingle on the radio – 'At the sound of the falling tree . . .' – all that came out because of the name.

The ending of the movie suggests many things: order is apparently restored and we're back where we began – with the happy family. Jeffrey asleep on the garden lounger might even imply that none of this really happened. But the sense of happiness is ambiguous.
That's the subject of *Blue Velvet*. You apprehend things, and when you try to see what it's all about, you have to live with it. So there's light and varying degrees of darkness.

So how has Jeffrey been affected by his experiences?
You can't keep doing things that you can't live with. You're going to get sick, or you're going to go crazy, or you're going to get arrested!

I wasn't sure which was more horrific: Frank's world or the unbelievable goodness represented by the happy family or Sandy's dream. In a way, they seemed as bad as each other.
I understand exactly. One is completely not able to deal with the other, and they're poles apart. I guess Jeffrey is the only bridge between the two.

At one point, Sandy asks Jeffrey, 'Are you a detective or a pervert?' And yet she is responsible for drawing him into the whole Dorothy Vallens affair. Why does she do that?
It's like mating or courting. There's a certain dance in courting where each

person encourages the other – you sense what they want and you encourage that. And then, when you get together, you know what the other person wants and you *dis*courage it! [Laughs.]

I remember talking to a film theorist/lecturer at the time of the film's release. Over the years she had done a lot of work on psychoanalysis and film, and her response to Blue Velvet *was, 'The film-makers are doing it for themselves!' In other words, the movie had almost made her redundant. It didn't have a subtext. It was all on the surface, in plain sight.*
It's all right there, yeah! [Laughs.]

The movie does seem to display or illustrate, almost perfectly, certain Freudian concerns and theories – and in an extreme, undiluted way. Was that intentional?
Let's put it this way: my reasoning mind didn't ever stop and say, 'What the hell am I doing?' That's why I keep saying that making films is a subconscious thing. Words get in the way. Rational thinking gets in the way. It can really stop you cold. But when it comes out in a pure sort of stream, from some other place, film has a great way of giving shape to the subconscious. It's just a great language for that.

Some directors have consciously used cinema as a very expensive form of self-analysis: projecting their problems large and in light, perhaps to try and come to a better understanding of them.
That's like an accidental thing for me. It could happen. Like seeing *Eraserhead* some years after I'd made it. I think I was surprised that it still worked but in a different way. It maybe became a hair clearer why I made it. I haven't had that experience with *Blue Velvet* yet.

One might be encouraged to think that Blue Velvet *could function that way for you by the apparent similarities between yourself and the character of Jeffrey.*
Like Jeffrey, I love mysteries. I'm like Henry in *Eraserhead*, and Jeffrey, because I get confused about things that I see and I worry about a lot of things and I'm curious. Both characters are really special to me, but I can't explain why exactly.

Through Dune, Blue Velvet *and* Twin Peaks, *Kyle MacLachlan has become associated with you in a similar way to, say, Jean-Pierre Léaud*

with François Truffaut. Is it possible that Kyle MacLachlan functioned as your alter ego in Blue Velvet*?*
People say that. Kyle buttoned his shirt up because he saw Jeffrey as me and he just took on certain things. So Kyle did dress like me in the picture.

What about your trademark, buttoned-up look at the time? How did that evolve?
That came about from a kind of insecurity thing, where I felt too vulnerable with the top button opened – especially with a wind on the collarbone. That was something that really disturbed me. And I liked that tightness around the neck.

What was it about Kyle himself that you thought was right for Blue Velvet*?*
Jeffrey is a guy in college. When I saw Kyle I could see Jeffrey. He's intelligent and he's handsome, so he goes good with the girls. And he can get this curiosity factor going. He can play naive and innocent and obsessive, and he can reason. With some actors, when you look in their eyes, you just don't see them thinking. Kyle can think on screen.

Jeffrey can connect different worlds. He can look into Sandy's world, he can look into Dorothy's world, he can get into Frank's world.

How did the actors deal with the more extreme elements of the film? Did they ask a lot of questions?
Every actor's different. Some people really want to get into the 'why's of every little word. And I love to do that. I like to talk about what could be going on in the mind of the character to make the words come out the way I want. A lot of directors I hear about say the line the way they want to hear it, and then the actor repeats it. That may work great, but it's way better if the mental thing is set up in such a way that the actor really understands. Then the line comes out exactly the way you want it, and the actor knows exactly why they said it and where it's coming from. Now they could say it ten more times that exact same way. But it takes a long time to get to that place. On *Blue Velvet* nobody ever sat down with me and wanted to know everything. But actors really seemed to like it. That kinda gave me hope.

It must have been difficult to cast the role of Dorothy Vallens.
Yes. A lot of actresses turned it down for one reason or another. But they said they loved it, and we would talk. Actors can smell a rat if it's not

working or isn't honest. And they can appreciate something and still not be able to play that role. I got some of the most positive feedback from actors who didn't end up being in the film. Helen Mirren really helped me on that script. I didn't even know Isabella Rossellini until late in the game. I happened to meet her in a restaurant in New York City one night, and not only did I meet her, but I found out that she was an actress. I thought that she was just a model. And I'm looking at her. And then a couple of days later when I'm thinking about it, I thought, 'I should offer her the role.'

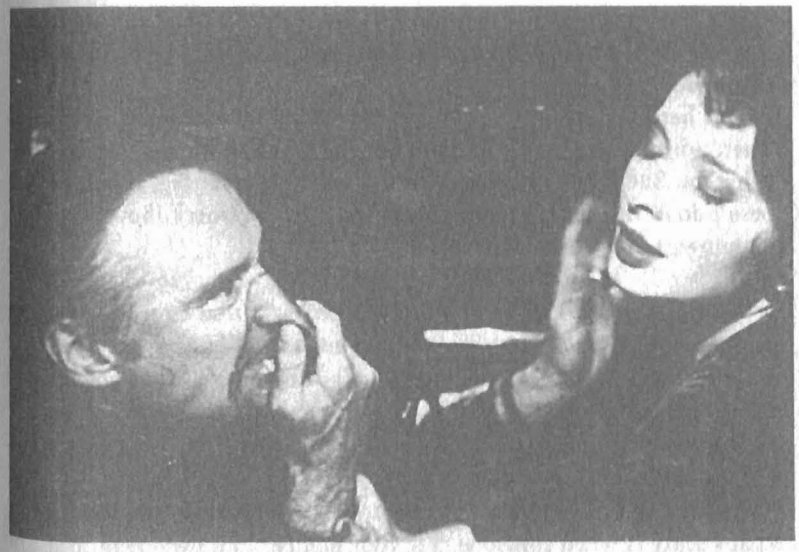
What was her initial reaction to the script?
She wanted to do it. I don't remember what we talked about, but I knew that she'd got it. And, you know, I think that after the film she got a lotta heat for doing it. It was probably harder on her than anyone else in the film.

It's well documented that Dennis Hopper called you up about wanting to do his role, saying that he was Frank Booth.
Yeah! I was caught in a bind, because I didn't want to know anybody like Frank. [Laughs.] And yet, for the film, I had to have that person. Dennis *was* Frank, but luckily he was also someone else too, so it worked out extremely well.

Did you have anyone else in mind before that?
No. I was searching, and I remember Dennis's name had come up, but he had this reputation. It's not that I don't wanna work with people who have problems. In fact, I'd rather do that than get the wrong person for the role. The character of Frank Booth had some problems, so whoever's going to come along and make it work might too. So we thought about Dennis, but I think we passed, possibly because we thought there'd be too many impossible problems to overcome, going by the rumours. Then Johanna Ray, the casting director, got this call, saying that Dennis was on the wagon and he'd read the script and he wanted to talk to me. And then we found that, sure enough, he'd done this other picture recently, and was incredible in it and there were no problems. And that was pretty much all it took for me because then I started thinking about him.

I understand that there was some discussion about the gases Frank uses when he's getting crazy. Wasn't it the initial intention that the actor should inhale real helium so that his voice would come out sounding like a child's?
Well, I hadn't really gotten that together, and this is where I'm thankful to

The heat is on. Lynch directs Isabella Rossellini in *Blue Velvet* (1986).



Baby wants to fuck. Frank (Dennis Hopper) gasses up in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

Dennis, because up until the last minute it was gonna be helium – to make the difference between 'Daddy' and the baby that much more. But I didn't want it to be funny. So helium went out the window and became just a gas. Then, in the first rehearsal, Dennis said, 'David, I know what's in these different canisters.' And I said, 'Thank God, Dennis, that you know that!' And he named all the gases. So he was off and running. It was very good that I had an expert who knew. [Laughs.] Dennis is a really talented guy. He's a painter, a director, an actor, a photographer and really good at each thing.

Was Frank always saying 'fuck' in the original script, or did Hopper improvise a lot of them?
I had many, many, many of them written in the script, but Dennis always added more, because you get on a roll, and you can't help yourself. And if an actor is locked into the groove so solidly, even if they say extra lines, or not exactly the way they're written, they're truthful. And for me Dennis was one of these guys. He always says that I could never say the word on set and that I would go to the script and say, 'Dennis, when you say *this* word.' [Laughs.] That's not true exactly.

Frank's first appearance in the movie is extremely disturbed and terrifying. Later, Sandy asks Jeffrey why there are people like Frank in the world. Does he scare you?
Yes. It's hard because you're close to the behind-the-scenes, as well as the scenes, when you're making a film. But the Frank in my mind scared me. Definitely. But it has to come with the mind. A great big, dumb person doesn't do it. A great big smart person is the one to worry about! Or even, you know, a *little* smart person.

He's not dissimilar to Killer Bob in Twin Peaks, *in that he seems to represent masculinity at the extreme – twisted, violent and psychotic. The good forces in* Twin Peaks *are not traditionally masculine: Dale Cooper is an intuitive, sensitive person who deploys all methods of detection – including the mystical and psychic. The bad forces seem to be very masculine, with no kind of feminine side to them.*
Maybe. Frank had a couple of strange things swimming around in there. What's scary is when someone gets your number and they seem to know you, whether it's imagined or real. And when they know you, they've got you because they can outsmart you. That's sort of what Frank has going for him.

It seems that Frank can't bear being observed. He often says, 'Now it's dark,' as if he finds it comforting, and screams, 'Don't you fuckin' look at me!' at Dorothy before forcing her to have sex with him. What's his problem?
That's understandable. He needed Dorothy there to do the things he was doing. But to see her eyes . . . reflected in those eyes could be any number of things that would jump him off track. He'd come face to face with a sickness, and that's not where the fun is. You wanna be able to do what you wanna do without any reminders or interference.

The film is very much about looking: Jeffrey looking; the audience looking into a world with him; Sandy being able to look into that world through Jeffrey. The first sex scene that we/Jeffrey observe from the safety of the closet is almost staged as a show – proscenium arch and all.
Yeah. Well, film is really voyeurism. You sit there in the safety of the theatre, and seeing is such a powerful thing. And we want to see secret things, we *really* wanna see them. New things. It drives you *nuts*, you know! And the more new and secret they are, the more we wanna see them.

Closet voyeur. Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) as the Candy-Coloured Clown in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

Was it always intended that the sex would be so extreme?
Well, it is and it sort of isn't. There's always a fine line, and it doesn't have to do with censorship; it has to do with how much is correct. And the only way you can know that is the little judge inside. You see a rehearsal and right there in those few instants you say, 'No, no, no. We have to go more than that,' or 'No, no, no, that's too much. We have to come back,' or 'For the story, for these characters, in this location, in this room, and in this mood, this is just right.'

Although you weren't required to cut any scenes out of the film, I gather you removed some yourself at an earlier stage. One sounded similar to the scene in Eraserhead *with the two women tied to the bed. Something about a woman setting her nipples alight?*
Right. That's one of my favourite scenes, but it was too much of a good thing. I wanna get this scene back, but I don't know if that's possible. I don't wanna reinstate it, but I want it to be its own little piece. It could be three or four minutes long. It was completely cut out. It was a kind of a companion piece to Ben's apartment.

What actually happens?
Well, Frank brings the guys and Jeffrey to the bar and they have the talk outside: 'What kind of beer do you like?' etc., etc., and then they enter Ben's place. But there was another scene inside the bar where the bartender sees Frank and signals to someone who starts running for the back door. Frank yells, 'Get him!' and they grab this guy Willard. The back room can be seen from the bar but it's sorta separated. There's a pool table back there and another guy who has a hat with 'I dig coal' written on it. He's this old, black blues guitar player and he's got a white guy playing with him. And 'I dig coal' can sing these songs that're just incredible. And then there are three or four completely nude girls back there who've been with Willard. They've been, you know, into something back there that's broken up by Willard seeing Frank. But you don't know what the problem is.

Meanwhile, the Brad Dourif character goes and orders one case of 'Pabst Blue Ribbon L-o-n-g Neck'. [Laughs.] So Frank throws Willard down on the pool table, and he starts talking to him about the fact that Willard tore his pocket and he says to the girls, 'Come here and take a look at a dead man.' Willard is, you know, in bad trouble: Frank has him where he wants him, mentally, and Willard knows that he's gonna get it. Some time. Then Frank goes upstairs. Everybody goes round the pool

table on their way upstairs and Jack Nance says to Willard, 'See ya, Winky,' and they disappear. You hold there for a little while and 'Winky' sits up. This one girl has been sitting there and she strikes a match and lights her nipples on fire and says, 'You're really going up in flames this time, motherfucker!' [Laughs.] And so that's how it ends.

How did she light her nipples?
They take these paper matches and split 'em apart and then lick them and put them on their nipples, so the match-head is sitting right there and you really can't see the little bit of cardboard. It's sitting right there, very close. It may come out a quarter inch, but it burns for a while and then you put them out. It just burns long enough for the cut. And so it moved pretty nicely, you know. There was stuff going on. A feel.

So the burning nipples weren't in the script?
No. The actress told me this trick, and I said, 'You gotta do that, and I'll tell you where.'

And the part of Willard was completely lost?
Completely lost. It had reference to . . . Jeffrey finds the ear in this field. Well, Frank had it in his pocket and he got into some altercation with Willard and his pocket was torn, so he lost the ear and his lucky piece of blue velvet. There are two cuts in Dorothy's robe. One of them was made to replace the lucky piece – the one that he has in the bar when he, you know, works it. Anyway, all that wasn't necessary. It actually took away from the scene upstairs in Ben's apartment because it was, as I said, 'too much of a good thing'.

Although Eraserhead *is peppered with sexual imagery, your movie work since* Blue Velvet *has been more obviously concerned with sex. I wonder . . .*
What happened to me! [Laughs.] Sex is such a fascinating thing. It's like jazz: you can listen to one pop song just so many times, whereas jazz has so many variations. Sex should be like that. It can be the same tune, but there are many variations on it. And then, when you start getting out there, it can be shocking to learn that something like that could be sexual. It would be kind of, you know, strange. But it's a real fact of life just the same. There's no real explaining it in *Blue Velvet* because it's just such an abstract thing in a person.

Certain aspects of sex are troubling – the way it's used as power, for instance, or the way it takes the form of perversions that exploit other

people. Those things are not good, but I think a lot of people find them a real kick and it's a fairly common sort of behaviour.

Twice in the movie Dorothy says about Jeffery, 'He put a disease in me.' What did she mean by that?

I could tell you, you know, but it's one of those things that even if someone says what it is, you'll say, 'Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.' You sort of know why she says that. The 'disease' Dorothy talks about is an abstract sort of thing. It doesn't mean AIDS, or anything like that. There was, in the script, even more on that theme. Dorothy's had that done to her before and she understands that thing, that sickness.

That first scene between Frank and Dorothy, where Jeffrey watches them from the closet, is crucial because it determines an audience's position in relation to the rest of the movie. Was there a lot of rehearsal involved to get it a certain way?

There was, because I think that was the first scene that we shot with Dennis. And always in the first scenes, you discuss things that are important to all the other scenes. And by getting the first scene correct you have money in the bank. In one of the initial scenes you're rehearsing, you're gonna find the key that unlocks that character and then you're really tuned in. And in that scene there were a lot of things happening, so we spent quite a long time on it. We only had the people on set that were needed. The actors were really good about everything. They were as comfortable as they could be and they found a lot of understanding.

Given that he wasn't around for the filming, and you had a high degree of freedom, what did Dino make of Blue Velvet *when he finally saw it?*

At a certain point Dino wanted to see the film. We were working in Berkeley, so the editing team flew down to LA and took it over to the screening room. Dino invited a lot of people in his company to come to the screening. And Dino says whatever he wants to say, in front of whoever's there. And so I was just *waiting*, you know, for something horrible to happen! At the end of the film Dino said something like 'Bravo!' He was *shocked* at how much he liked this film, and understood this film! [Laughs.] It was a beautiful thing.

But then he always wants to sit with it on the moviola and watch it with you, reel by reel. And then it's, 'AH! DAVID! YOU MUST CUT! IT IS *SO* SLOW! DAVID! YOU MUST CUT,' and stuff like this. But I had final cut so it really didn't matter what he said.

And then Dino had this foreign sales guy showing it over in Europe. And the guy was saying to him, 'Dino, people are diggin' this film! We're selling this film!' So Dino called me into his office and he says he's not sure but *maybe* a wider audience will like this film. He says, 'We make tests!' So there was a theatre in the valley showing *Top Gun*, and Dino sneaks *Blue Velvet* in there one night. My agent Rick Nicita and some other agents at CAA went to the screening and they left just as the film ended. They called me from the car and told me they thought it went great. So I'm, like, all pumped up, and I go to sleep that night so happy, because they were all screaming over the car phone and all this stuff. But Laura Dern's mother, Diane Ladd, and some of her friends went to that same screening, and they were being much quieter about the film. So I said, 'They don't know, Rick knows.' And I went to sleep.

I got up real early the next morning (Dino goes to work, like, *so* early). So I called him up and a secretary answers the phone. And I said, 'It's David Lynch calling. Is Dino there?' [In a solemn tone:] 'Oh, yes, David, he's here.' So she transfers me, and this guy who's Head of Distribution picks up. [Jaunty:] 'Hey, Larry, it's David Lynch. How're you doin'? Is Dino there?' [Tragic:] 'Oh, David . . .' So I say, 'Larry! What's the deal? It went great.' And he says, 'It did *not* go great.' I said, 'What're you talking about, Larry?' He said, 'It was a *disaster*!' I said, 'Larry, don't bullshit me! Tell me. It was *great*, are you kidding me? Come on!' And he says, 'I'll give you Dino.' So Dino comes on: 'Ah! It is DISASTER! Come to my office. We talk!'

So Rick and I went over to Dino's office and they had the cards from the screening. They were like: 'David Lynch should be shot!' Question: 'What did you like best about the movie?' Answers: 'The dog, Sparky'; 'The ending!'; 'When it was over!' It was like the worst preview screening Larry – who'd been in the business for years – had *ever* seen. The cards were the worst he had *ever, ever* seen. And if it wasn't for Dino, they might have put the movie on the shelf. I'm not kidding. But Dino said, 'David. We took chance, and we see now it's not a film for everybody. So we learn and we go on.' So they geared up and got a lot of the key critics who were seeing the film and *really* saying nice things. When it hit the theatres, it never really did any big business, but it was solid. And about six months later or so, Larry calls me up and he says, 'David, I just gotta tell you something,' and I say, 'What's that?' He says, 'Remember that theatre where we had our preview? *Blue Velvet* is playing there, and there're lines around the block! I just wanted to let you know that.' So that was a nice ending.

But what was the nature of the audience that attended the preview? Was it a Top Gun *audience? That wouldn't make much sense.*
It doesn't make any sense. But Dino did an experiment, and he didn't let it shake him. It was actually a good thing because he didn't have high expectations after that. So whatever came was frosting on the cake. And it was one of his most successful films that year. I think Dino wants a breakaway film. He really wants the film that gets the reviews and does tons of money. I didn't ever think about *Blue Velvet* having a chance with a wider audience. I just thought we'd weathered a potential disaster. And like my agent said: 'Most producers getting those cards would not react the way Dino reacted.' It didn't really faze him.

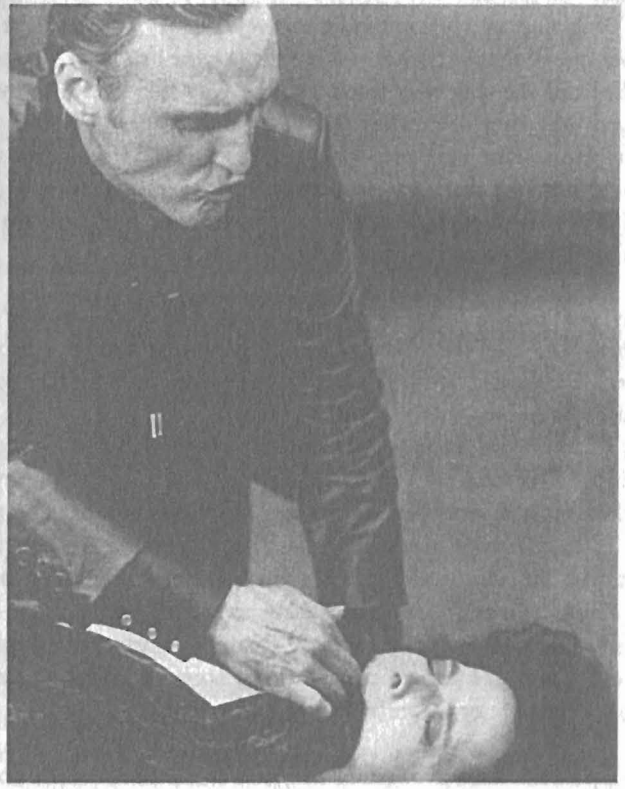
But the responses on those cards aren't necessarily out of keeping with the movie. It obviously touches some nerves.
It's a tricky thing. That's why it's the actual word-of-mouth on a film – after the first weekend – that makes or breaks it. The reviews and the ads suddenly seem hollow and completely false. Or they seem to be the truth and people reinforce it one way or the other as they talk. And *Blue Velvet* had great word-of-mouth. Talking about it was so important to that film. I think some people could despise it. If you don't like the story or what it's saying, then you just end up hating everything. It's not a movie for everybody. Some people really dug it. Others thought it was disgusting and sick. And, of course, it is but it has two sides. You have to have the contrasts. Films should have power. The power of good and the power of darkness, so you can get some thrills and shake things up a bit. If you back off from that stuff, you're shooting right down into lukewarm junk.

Any time there's a little bit of power, somebody might think it is sick or disgusting. A lot of the time when you go out to an extreme, you can make a fool of yourself or a fool of the film. You have to believe things so much that you make them honest. I'm not trying to manipulate an audience. I'm just trying to, you know, get in there and let the material talk. To work inside a dream. If it's real, and if you believe it, you can say almost anything.

Inevitably, some people – not only women – are upset by Dorothy's masochism and Frank's extreme sadism. On the film's opening night in London the cinema was picketed.
Well, I can understand that, for sure. But without that relationship, there wouldn't have been a film. You know what I mean? It's like one story. These characters in this tiny place.

That response isn't necessarily a call for censorship, but a criticism of the treatment of women in films. It's often the case that women in movies get abused and don't seem to mind too much or do anything about it.
Yes, but it's in the human family. Someone out there says, 'I know a girl just like Dorothy and she gets into this syndrome. And I know a guy that's like Frank who takes advantage of it.' The two are meant for each other. They're both quite a bit out of balance. That's why they're together. And the relationship can only work that way. And so it's not unique. It's a thing that's around. I guess it's in the air.

A negative response to the movie, based on the sado-masochistic relationship between Frank and Dorothy, might stem from a call for something



Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) and Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) 'in the human family' in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

different, something that doesn't reinforce those images? After all, it is the woman who is the masochist.
But what isn't right is to assume that a character like Dorothy Vallens is every woman. Then you can't just do a story about these characters. Suddenly, if it's a black man, he represents all black men. If it's a woman, she represents all women. If it's a kid, it's all kids. And they just go to town on you. The films are about these particular characters, this kind of situation, this little corner of the world. Relax! It goes on, you know. It doesn't necessarily go on exactly like that, but pretty soon you won't be able to make movies. There are so many different groups out there that are going to be upset about something.

So how did you feel about the negative response to Blue Velvet*'s content?*
It's kind of damaging. Let's not kid ourselves. But say you meet the person that wrote one of those articles: you see the way he or she is. You see their personality and the way they think and the way they are. Then you can understand why they said what they did, and it doesn't bother you so much any more. Not that you don't respect them, but you can see that they would not like that. But you don't meet everyone, so you imagine things. I don't know what happened to constructive criticism. Now it's a pan or a rave, and on to the next thing.

How do you situate yourself in arguments about censorship? David Cronenberg has said that since there are plenty of people – producers, financiers, distributors, etc. – who will censor your work further down the line, he refuses to censor himself at the outset.
For me, I fall in love with a story and the characters and a mood. The whole thing. Everyone who makes something has a line that they won't cross, whatever it is. And they have a way of telling the story and pushing it so far. It's just known inside yourself. That's the thing to keep checking on: is it true for this world and these characters? And then once it's finished – since you can't control anything after that, you've got to let it go – there shouldn't be anybody saying, 'This is very upsetting to me, you have to cut it out.' It's just ridiculous. Pretty soon your film would be cut down to a frame of sky if everyone had a whack at it.

It's also a political issue though. Even if you're not particularly politically motivated, the work inevitably has a political dimension when it's released into the culture.
If you're a politically motivated or thinking person, you'll see everything

that comes out in terms of politics. If you're a very religious person, you'll see everything that comes out in terms of religion or religious things. So you just have to concentrate on your work and put it out. I think politics are at one level and if you don't go above that level, you're gonna be stymied and frustrated. It's the never-ending dilemma, the no-win situation: two sides, so opposed, so articulate, but one doesn't listen to the other and things never change. And anything that makes a difference happens outside of it anyway. It just seems like a *horror* story!

I don't even like to use the phrase 'political correctness' because I think it's an invention of the Right, but what does that phrase mean to you?
I'll tell you what it means: it's almost an evil, satanic plot! It's a diabolical thing. It's this false way of not offending anyone. To be politically correct is to be so sort of lukewarm, and in this weird little spot where there's no offence committed. It's like hiding.

It's difficult though, isn't it. Because language does carry politics, the issue is not really about stopping artists from being creative, but about finding a language – and images – which will allow people to maintain their dignity.
Yes. But when we were doing *On the Air* – this comedy on TV – one of the characters, 'Blinky', was blind. They said, 'You can't have a blind person. It's tied in with humour, and you're making fun of blind people.' I remember *It's a Gift* – a W.C. Fields movie – and there was a blind man with a cane in it and it was one of the most unbelievably funny things. Now it's getting down to the point where blind people have a Society and any jokes about blind people now are banned because it's an insult to blind people. So there's one avenue of humour snipped off. But there's something about humour that is rude, and it makes people laugh. I don't know what triggers it. But jokes like that are not *meant* to hurt blind people – not in a *million years*!

Wild at Heart *is full of 'disadvantaged' people. Presumably your position on that is not 'Look at these freaks and let's laugh at them'?*
No way! They're just people in this world. Like the Grace Zabriskie character with the false leg. I don't know exactly where that came from, but a lot of things like that grew out of accidents. Like this guy who wanted to play the manager of the hotel. It was all set for him to be in the film and he called up Johanna Ray and said, 'I'm so sorry! But I can't do the film.' And Johanna said, 'Why?' and he says, 'Well, I've broken my foot and it's in a huge cast.' So Johanna told me, 'He can't be in the film,' and I said,

'What're you talking about? That's fantastic. He's gotta be in the film.' I didn't want him because he had two good feet! So I had him in the cast. Then we had this really, really old guy with a cane. All of them were in some way not 100 per cent together, physically. And so it just became part of the scene. You get the feeling of the joy of everyone being together, regardless of whatever. And it's just great. There's another thing going on. Everybody's welcome. That's the way it should be.

The independent movie Living In Oblivion *took a swipe at you by featuring a midget in a dream sequence – as if doing so automatically guaranteed 'weirdness'. Did anyone ever say anything to you about The Man from Another Place, that you used Michael Anderson's size simply to denote 'weird'?*

No. Not that I can recall. I mean, who could have a problem with little Mike? [Laughs.]

7

Suddenly My House Became a Tree of Sores

A Tale of *Twin Peaks*

The news that David Lynch was involved in making a 'soap opera' for American television came as a shock. It was hard to imagine the sensibility that had produced *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet* ever finding adequate expression in that most conservative of media institutions. However, thanks to a partnership with Mark Frost – who had considerable experience of working within the confines of weekly TV drama – *Twin Peaks* came to pass. In the event, constraints relating to 'taste' and content not only posed few real problems for *Twin Peaks*, but resulted in some ingenious solutions.

Lynch is clear about the downsides for his own practice of working in the medium of television. It's interesting to note that these relate primarily to the quality of image and sound (or lack of it), and to the difficulties of speaking directly to an audience through a medium dominated by dream breakers (the commercials) and wayward network scheduling.

Some commentators have assumed that the Lynch/Frost partnership was simply one in which the former had exclusive rights on the 'weird' factor, while the latter provided the strategies and working practices necessary to the creation and production of the series. However, this ignores some of the more eccentric contributions Frost had made to shows such as *Hill Street Blues*, and the fact that the partnership had already produced a bizarre feature script entitled *One Saliva Bubble*. Robert Engels, a contributing writer of *Twin Peaks* (both the TV series and the movie) and a friend of Frost and Lynch, outlines the premise: 'It's about an electric bubble from a computer that bursts over this town and changes people's personalities – like these five cattlemen, who suddenly think they're Chinese gymnasts. It's insane!'

Ironically, the form of the TV soap opera may have offered Lynch a chance to return to the protracted dream. The continuing story of *Twin Peaks* – which spanned the feature-length pilot and a further twenty-nine episodes – afforded Lynch the opportunity to sink into its world in a way similar to that of *Eraserhead*. As a result, its grip on him apparently outlived both network and audience loyalty; he was later compelled to return to the town and its characters for the movie prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*.

The continuing story format also enabled Lynch to develop certain key preoccupations more effectively than in the features. The form's ability to accommodate and maintain a large number of diverse characters allowed him to indulge his affection for speech rhythms and the particular qualities of the performers'

voices. The influence of the forest and of language (his mother) are here felt more strongly than ever before, as is Lynch's ability to generate unbearable emotion; the series is remarkable for its many scenes of naked pain and despair, often expressed in uncontrollable sobbing.

The first series of *Twin Peaks* was an immense success with audiences worldwide. According to Robert Engels this was because: 'It was a TV show about free-floating guilt. Something was captured there that people responded to emotionally. Also, the characters in *Twin Peaks* were so *real*. Other shows lack that. We never had fans who were Trekkie types; the guys who watched *Twin Peaks* were, like, head lobbyists for General Motors.'

Critical reaction was also enthusiastic, although the accompanying hype and (one suspects) the series' assault on a cherished fireside form, inevitably led to some scepticism. While a number of critics gleefully asked if television, or television audiences, were ready for it, others accused it of being a postmodern train to nowhere. The genuine affection of *Twin Peaks* for some of the conventions of TV melodrama was often perceived – perversely – as simply too clever and knowing. Lynch's departure from the second series to make *Wild at Heart* did not help matters and the show was soon cancelled.

By the time Lynch unveiled *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* in 1992, critical reaction had become hostile, and only now is the movie enjoying a degree of cautious but sympathetic critical re-evaluation. It is, undoubtedly, one of Lynch's cruellest, bleakest neighbourhood visions, and even managed to displease die-hard fans of the series. Lynch had refused the obvious: the movie did not pick up where the series had left off (the cliffhanger ending of Bob's triumph over Special Agent Dale Cooper), nor did it simply reprise the sub plots, humour and folksy catch-phrases that had made the television show so popular. Instead, the film elects to go back to a hidden past – the last few days of Laura Palmer's life – for a brilliant but excoriating account of incest, abuse and brutality. In exposing the very heart of the TV series, Lynch was forced to accept that he was unlikely ever to return to the town of Twin Peaks again.

RODLEY: *Mark Frost, your partner in the creation and making of* Twin Peaks, *came from television and had a reputation for his involvement with successful cop shows like* Hill Street Blues. *Superficially, the two of you don't seem a likely combination. How did that partnership come about?*

LYNCH: [Laughs.] I'll try to tell you, but it's impossible to say why so many things happen. It started with Marilyn Monroe. Mark had a fixation on this book about Monroe called *The Goddess*, and a producer at Warner Brothers calls me and wants to talk to me about making this thing about Marilyn Monroe, based on this book. I was sort of interested. I loved the idea of this woman in trouble, but I didn't know if I liked it being a real story. Mark wanted to be the writer on it, and I would be the director.

And since I wasn't 100 per cent sure which way the wind was gonna blow on this thing, I said, 'Fine.' I met Mark, and we all had talks, and he went off and started writing.

But meanwhile I went to lunch with Mark at this place on Wilshire – it was a Carnation Dairy restaurant. And we were sitting at a table and I said, 'Mark, have you ever been interested in comedy?' and he said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Would you like to write a comedy with me?' and he said, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'It's called *One Saliva Bubble*. And he said, 'Great.' I was with Dino at the time, so we got this little room in Dino's place, and we started writing. And we were 100 per cent on the same wavelength. We were falling on the floor laughing. We thought it was a riot! And we were laughing and writing and laughing and writing. So we finished *One Saliva Bubble* and almost made it. I can't remember what went wrong. And *The Goddess* didn't work out either. So now I'm friends with Mark.

How did this working relationship then lead you to Twin Peaks?

My agent Tony Krantz had been obsessed since *Blue Velvet* with trying to get us to do something in television. And we were saying, 'Well, yeah, maybe.' So one day Mark and I were talking at Du Pars, the coffee shop on the corner of Laurel Canyon and Ventura, and, all of a sudden, Mark and I had this image of a body washing up on the shore of a lake.

And that image triggered the whole thing?

Yeah. That's how it came to pass. [Laughs.] Originally it was called 'Northwest Passage', a story which took place in a small town in North Dakota. But we didn't think this idea was so important. It was just like having some freedom, and saying, 'Hey, let's see what happens.' But I liked the idea of a story in episodes that would go on for a long time.

How did the writing relationship work between the two of you?

We worked together, especially in the initial stages. Later on we started working more apart. Mark is really a computer whiz. And in his writing room at his house, he's got these computers and tables designed for the computer world. And he's got like a psychiatrist's chaise longue that I'd lie on. Mark is a great typist, and I can't type. So we worked at his place. We did something, and then I had to go to New York for some reason so we had a modem set up to Isabella Rossellini's house. We were on the phone and on the computer and Mark would be typing and I would see it come up in front of me. Really amazing! And then I came back to LA and we finished it in the same room. I brought it back to my house, and I sat down

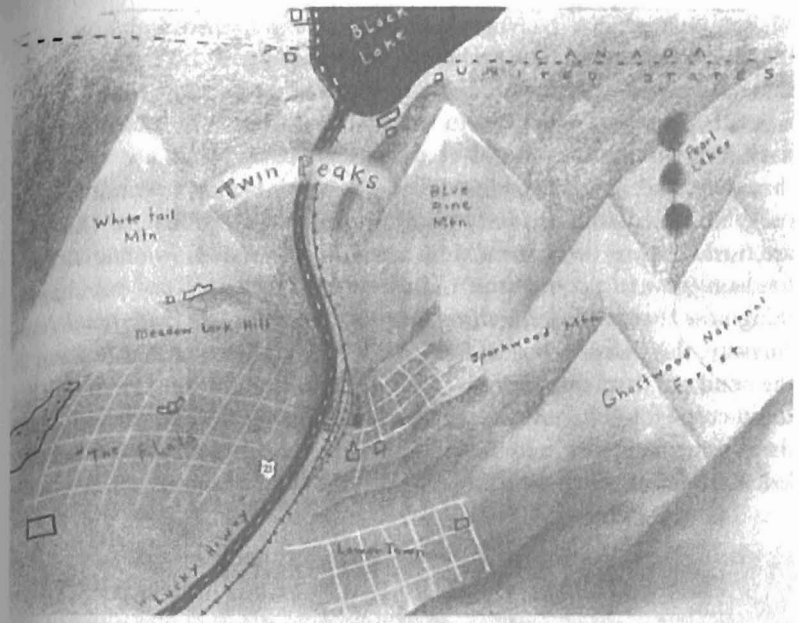
and read it and it hit me that it was a really good thing! And I called Mark and I said, 'You know, this is really good!' And he says to me, 'It is! I've just been reading it.' It surprised us. But it was a long time later that we actually got ABC to sign on.

You hadn't really had any experience of TV at that time. How did they react to the idea at first? What were the meetings like?
Well, on the way to ABC to pitch *Twin Peaks*, Mark picked me up and we drove down Melrose. I look at licence plates of cars. I started doing it before *Eraserhead*. I was driving down Sunset Boulevard and there was a really beat-up Volkswagen in front of me, but it had my initials, DKL, and some numbers. And this struck me as a good omen. So I developed this thing where if you see your initials in any order, that's good. (There's very little bad in this thing!) And if the numbers add up to a good number for you, that's even better! And if the car itself is a really good car for you – that's even better! So the ultimate would be your initials in the correct order, a number that adds up to one that you like, and a car that's good. OK.

So Mark and I were turning onto Santa Monica Boulevard, just before Doheny, and coming around the corner was this brand new, white Mercedes. And it had my initials on it and a good number! And I said, 'Mark, this is going to be very good!'

What exactly was your pitch to ABC?
The mystery of who killed Laura Palmer was the foreground, but this would recede slightly as you got to know the other people in the town and the problems they were having. And each week would feature close-ups of some things. The project was to mix a police investigation with the ordinary lives of the characters. We had drawn a map of the town. We knew where everything was located and that helped us determine the prevailing atmosphere and what might happen there. I guess what made *Twin Peaks Twin Peaks* is hard to talk about. I don't think *we* even knew what it was. But ABC said they wanted to do the pilot.

Was there much of a gap between completing that pilot episode and then making the first series?
Yes. When you complete the pilot, they can't make a decision. It's impossible for them to make a decision on their own. These people are *unreal*. You can't believe what you're seeing. So they send it to Philadelphia, and women, men, children, grandmothers – test groups come and see it. These test groups fill out cards and then the television executives react to these



Mapping out a soap opera.

cards. I don't know what they do then – flip a coin or something. And somehow they decided to make the series. Seven more episodes. So we got this giant warehouse studio out on *Balboa* and started building sets. We had our stock footage from the pilot, and someone made return trips to get other things, but we left the location and went to stage shooting.

Was all the comedy about coffee and pies an integral part of the idea from the beginning?
Yes. It started in the pilot. That was one thing that was so great. I had the sense of freedom making that pilot. The euphoria of 'this probably isn't going to go anywhere, let's really do it'.

And yet coffee, doughnuts and cherry pie tend to be the things people remember from the series.
Yes, I know! And it's interesting. Cherry pie and the coffee were definitely in the script, but the importance of it was emphasized as it went along.

How difficult was it to find a location that matched your ideas of this town?

Well, once it became the Northwest we just went up there and did a lot of location scouting and found a lot of great, great places. Like the sawmill – that was pretty incredible because it was a beautiful old sawmill. Now, when they grow a tree, it gets to twenty-four inches in diameter and they hack it down. But then they'd have this Old Stand, you know, with trees that were, like, ancient and huge. And one of my favourite woods is vertical-grain Douglas Fir. It's just beautiful stuff. Now it's different. The rings are further apart, because the trees are more like weeds, you know. They let them grow to a certain size and *phiew* – off they go. They even have a thing now that pinches the thing off: they don't cut 'em, they *pinch* 'em! Anyway, this place had some five- or six-foot-in-diameter logs floating in the pond out there that they saved for us. And they'd bring 'em up this big chain conveyor belt and whack 'em off with this *giant* circular saw. And then this woman in a hard hat would come out with a stick and touch the log. And she's the highest paid person on the floor of the sawmill.

Sheriff Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean) and Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) enjoy some damn good coffee and doughnuts in *Twin Peaks* (1989).

I don't understand. A real 'log lady'?
Well, she would touch the log and write something in a notebook and she gets the big bucks. From there the log would go and be thrown down a ramp and the sawyer would grab it with this giant hydraulic deal. He's got about eight or ten levers in front of him and he'd run this thing through a band-saw. It's like forty feet up and down, quarter-inch-thick steel, and this log – how much mass is in a *giant* log? – slams into this band-saw and the band-saw does not even jerk! It's so sharp and going so fast it cuts that log like butter. And the sawyer cuts it into certain shapes and sizes, and the reason the lady is the highest paid is she knows exactly what that sawyer's gonna do with it and she's already computed the number of board feet in that log, mentally.

The old mill was torn down two months after we got there. And a little mill went up – a little, efficient mill that will only take twenty-four-inch diameter logs. But it was so great and we had maybe four days shooting inside and outside and we were always using those images – the saw blades and stuff. I wanted to shoot those but not for the title sequence. Then, later on, it became part of that.

Presumably you were there a fair amount of time. How did it work with the community?
They were so happy. There's this story about the Double R Diner. See, the highway used to go through the town and so the diner was, you know, doing business. And then the big freeway went in and nobody was stopping there. And the owner – Peggy, I think her name was – used to make, like, maybe only six pies a day when we first got there, if that. After *Twin Peaks* she was making sixty pies a day! Buses were pulling up in front of the place, filled with Germans or Japanese, people from all over the world, going into the diner and having cherry pie and coffee. That place is on the map, you know, for ever.

So is the town of Snoqualmie still trading on Twin Peaks*?*
Yes. They have a *Twin Peaks* festival up there each summer, but I'm sure that business has decreased again for Peggy. But there'll always be people stopping by, I hope. She's really great. And she really makes great pies. *Unbelievable!*

Once you were in production, how did the partnership with Mark work in terms of your respective strengths?
Mark is a really good complement to me and I don't know quite how.

He's very smart – which complements me! And he's educated in ways that I'm not. And he always understood what I was saying. Maybe he helped bring me into more of a real world.

How much of the developing story of Twin Peaks *was worked out in advance? Did you have a pretty good idea of where it was going?*
Yes. In TV they have names for everything. Like the 'arc' of the story: where it's going, who's going to do what and all that stuff. And it makes sense to have a plan. So we wrote down our arc, but that's a real general thing. Filling in the blanks is what's so much fun. But the arc satisfies the executives.

I wonder if you could elaborate on a sense of place in terms of Twin Peaks. *Most American TV series have no sense of place whatsoever, even though so many of them take their names from specific cities or places.*
Right. In my mind this was a place surrounded by woods. That's important. For as long as anybody can remember, woods have been mysterious places. So they were a character in my mind. And then other characters came to our minds. And as you start peopling this place, one thing leads to another. And somewhere along the line you have a certain type of community. And because of the way the characters are, you have indications of what they might do, and how they could get into trouble and how their past could come back to haunt them. And so you have many things to work with.

There are things about the Northwest that are unique. And what always amazed me is how that place translates all around the world. There was something about it that people understood and appreciated all at once and really *got*. Incredible.

Do you think that was because it was *so specific?*
It could have been. Or it could've been extremely specific and nobody would want to know about it! [Laughs.] It's a mystery. Why do people in Japan get going on *Twin Peaks* so much? Or in Germany, or Australia? It just caught something.

In many respects the series looked like a challenge to standard TV.
Right, but that wasn't something we were thinking about. If you just do something to be different, it'll always have a false beginning. This just came out of ideas. We could've done the pilot and seven episodes and it'd be nothing.

In Europe there was a movie-length version of the pilot episode available on video which gave more clues about who killed Laura Palmer by adding scenes with Killer Bob – a character who didn't surface until episode three of the series. Why did you do more than one version? It might give too much away too soon.
That's the way we were told it had to be. ABC give you a certain amount of money to do, say, the pilot, or an episode, but – and I don't know why – they don't give you quite enough to do it, based on some sort of norm. So you get deficit financing – meaning another company puts up the remainder of the money, which is not very much at all. But it's a scam. They get the world rights as a result of putting in this little bit of money. If you were smart, you would never accept that, and just do it with the money ABC gave you. Get real! But we were talked into it: 'This is the way it is, this is the way it is.'

And then partway through they told me another thing. They'd said it before, but I didn't listen. People kept saying it more loudly until finally they said, 'You have to shoot an alternate ending. It has to have an ending for foreign markets.' I always thought I was gonna say, 'Forget it!' Most people maybe just tag something on – but where's that at? If it's going out with your name on it, it's gotta *be* something, you know.

But we had only twenty-four days to shoot the pilot episode. And it's cold. You can't imagine how cold it is! I went into this mountain climbing shop and they said, 'These pants are rated such-and-such: you can be on Mount Everest and live through it.' So I had rain things and boots and all the latest and greatest stuff. You could hardly walk when you were in it. And still I was freezing some nights. It was *unbelievably* cold! You're tired, you're shooting nights, outside in the freezing cold, and you're not moving around very much. You just sit. And it's wet cold: it goes right inside, and you just start to shiver. And every one of us was, like, going crazy!

Is it true that Killer Bob – played by Frank Silva – was an idea that came up only when you were shooting? He was not an element of the initial pitch to ABC, was he?
No. Frank Silva was the set dresser. We were shooting in Laura Palmer's bedroom, and Frank's in there, doing his thing. He's moving the furniture around, and he moves this chest-of-drawers and it ends up in the doorway. So now Frank is in the room and everybody else is outside, and someone – and I don't know who it was – said, 'Frank, don't lock yourself in the room,' you know. And, BINGO! This thing comes in my head and I

said, 'Frank, are you an actor?' And he said, 'Yes,' and I said, 'Do you want to be in this movie?' He said, 'Yes!' And I said, 'You're in this movie!' Then he says, 'What am I gonna do?' And I says, 'I don't know, but you're in this movie.'

What had occurred to you exactly?
Well, I was unsure about this idea, but something was happening. We needed this shot which was just a slow pan around Laura's room. It was going to be used as Laura's mother is thinking back, later that night. So we shot two regular pans and then I said, 'Frank, get down behind the bed on your knees, and put your hands on the little bed bars, and freeze. Just look at this mark. Don't move. Don't blink. Just look.' And we did the same thing: panned with the same pace, everything. And it was kind of scary, because you don't know what it's leading to.

And what was it leading to?
Well, it's night now, and we're shooting downstairs in the living room. I think we were pretty much finishing up with the Palmer house. And Grace Zabriskie is on the couch and she's smoking, and she's gonna have these thoughts now. She's in sadness and she's tormented, and she's thinking. And she's gonna see something. We'd shot the heart necklace under the rock, and someone finding it. And that was probably what she was gonna see. So at a certain point she sits bolt upright. Now, the camera operator was on the floor and he's gotta *whip up* with Grace to get her scream. And so, WHAM! He whips up, and she screams *fantastic,* like Grace can. *'Beautiful!'* And the operator said, '*Not* beautiful.' I said, 'What is the matter?' He says, 'Someone was reflected in the mirror.' And I said, 'Everybody hold still! Where?' I looked through the eyepiece, and who is reflected in the mirror? At the bottom of an old mirror is Frank! And I just said, 'This is *perfect*!' But I still didn't know what in hell it meant.

Killer Bob became crucial to both the plot and – more importantly – the unusual and fearful tone of Twin Peaks. *How did these 'accidents' finally cohere into something you could integrate with the pilot, and later the series?*
I can't remember the exact sequence of events, but we had a one-armed man in the pilot: Mike. It was a kind of *hommage* to *The Fugitive*. The only thing he was gonna do was be in this elevator and walk out. That's it! But I happened to get one of the all-time great actors and people for the part. He only had one arm so he got the gig, but he happened to be a great actor and a great person! So then you start thinking about stuff, and one

day, on the way to work, I wrote this thing: 'Through the darkness of future past the magician longs to see. One chants out between two worlds, "Fire – walk with me."' We were in this hospital that day where we had many little things to shoot, and we're just winging stuff for this ending that we had to do. Feeling our way. Cooper and Truman arrive and there's this guy Mike there, and he says these things, in the dark almost. And his voice is so fantastic! He could've had a Mickey Mouse voice, but I get this great voice! And that sort of created the whole Killer Bob thing.

Another other-worldly character who also became extremely important to the look and feel of the series is The Man from Another Place. It's a shock when he first appears in a murder mystery set in a logging town. How did that character, or abstraction, come about?
Well, I met Mike Anderson in 1987 – one of the many times I was thinking about gearing up for *Ronnie Rocket*. I'd seen a short film of him and knew he'd be perfect for the character of Ronnie Rocket. I met him at McGoo's in downtown New York City, and he was wearing all gold: gold shoes, gold pants, gold jacket. And he was pulling a wagon, I think. [Laughs.] As is so often the case, *Ronnie Rocket* didn't happen. So now a few years later I'm finishing up the plot for *Twin Peaks*. We were editing the alternative ending foreign version over at some editing rooms at CFI laboratory in LA – working with the alternate ending footage that we had shot up in Seattle. It wasn't completely coming together in a satisfactory way. One night at about 6.37 p.m. in the evening I remember it was very warm. Duwayne Dunham and his assistant Brian Burdan and I were leaving for the day. We were out in the parking lot and I was leaning against a car – the front of me was leaning against this very warm car. My hands were on the roof and the metal was very hot. The Red Room scene leapt into my mind. 'Little Mike' was there and he was speaking backwards. I told Duwayne that I had an idea that I thought he would like very much, but that I couldn't talk about it. For the rest of the night I thought only about The Red Room.

What's also striking about his first appearance in Dale Cooper's dream is that the whole scene is shot in reverse. How did that come about?
In 1971 I asked Alan Splet to record me saying 'I want pencils.' I asked Alan to reverse that sentence. I learned it phonetically backwards and then spoke the backwards version and Al recorded that. That was reversed, which made it sound forward, but a beautifully strange version of the original. I was going to use this technique at a certain point in *Eraserhead* for

A little mystery. The Man from Another Place (Michael Anderson) dances in reverse in *Twin Peaks* (1989).

The tracks of my tears. Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) learns of her daughter's death in *Twin Peaks* (1989).

a scene which was never shot in the pencil factory. When I got the Red Room idea this must have been coming back to me. Then the idea followed that the visual would all have to be done backwards as well. That Red Room scene was the most fun I've ever had shooting something and the result was so beautiful to me. It was done for the alternate ending European version, but that scene had repercussions all throughout the *Twin Peaks* series.

If Killer Bob and The Man from Another Place were added later, did you simply tell ABC that Leland Palmer was Laura's killer?
We never said who it was to anybody. And Bob and Little Mike, they weren't even a spark in anybody's mind – ours included.

But the movie-length version does tell you about Bob way before the series does, so some people knew more in advance because they'd seen it.
Yes, but it had the feeling of an ending that may or may not relate to anything else. I saw it not that long ago. It all happens so fast and nothing was really that thought out, but they were indicators for the future.

The pilot episode has a lot of crying in it. Deputy Andy Brennan cries when he tries to photograph Laura's dead body for the police files; both Laura's parents cry painfully and at length; the school principal and Laura's classmates weep. You seem to like crying. Is that true?
Yeah, I guess I am big on that. Girls crying, men crying, women crying: crying in general. It's powerful if they really are feeling it. It's like a yawn: it transfers over. Like Andy. He's a man and he's crying. It's a rare thing, you know, to see a policeman crying. It comes from Roy Orbison, I guess! No. In this case, it's when something cements this identification, and it's unleashed. When the person can't speak the rest of a sentence and chokes up in a certain way, you're *gone*. You know that feeling and it sweeps over you.

Sarah Palmer is calling her husband, Leland, at the very moment he is approached by Sheriff Truman and realizes what has happened to his daughter. That scene, with its mutual suffering taking place down the phone line, really does prolong the pain unbearably. How much was that to do with pushing the form of the TV soap opera?
It wasn't about pushing. It's watching two people realize something horrible. And it happens in time, in a sequence. And the audience knows much more than they do. And so it's painful. You can see they're both in different places, and you can just see it coming, when Sheriff Truman's car arrives.

It happens again, not very long after, when you get the chain reaction effect of Laura's empty seat in the classroom. The cop comes in, classmates look at each other, a girl is running across the lawn outside screaming, and people start crying uncontrollably . . .
Right, exactly. But those things happen in life. The mind, being a detective, pieces these fragments together and comes to a conclusion. And once that conclusion hits you, you know, it's over. It's *over*. And here again, the audience knows more than the characters know. So when the audience looks at something, it adds what it knows to that look. Like with an empty chair in a classroom.

Did the character of Special Agent Dale Cooper develop at all during the shooting of the series, or was he fully formed before?
Fully formed. Kyle was born for that role.

Did Kyle have much to do with developing his own role, or have any input into the series in general?
Well, Kyle loves little gadgets. Like a particular kind of lighter, say, or a particular kind of knife, or a particular kind of combo knife that'll have screwdrivers and stuff like that on it. He once gave me this thing which was like a flint, and a little thing you hit it with and you could start a fire. And he's got a lot of perky, childlike faces – when he's left alone. And those things fitted into Cooper. So, by being Kyle, he brought a lot to Cooper.

But then there's another part of Kyle that fights Cooper. I'm not saying that he wasn't Cooper when other people directed him – but sometimes I would have to kick him up to another gear. It's right inside of him, but he might get laid back, or kinda serioso or something, and not have the energy, alertness and the spark that Cooper has. You've got to watch it, because there are a lot of other things in Kyle that aren't Cooper. It's like with a sculpture: you just keep chipping away all those parts that aren't the body.

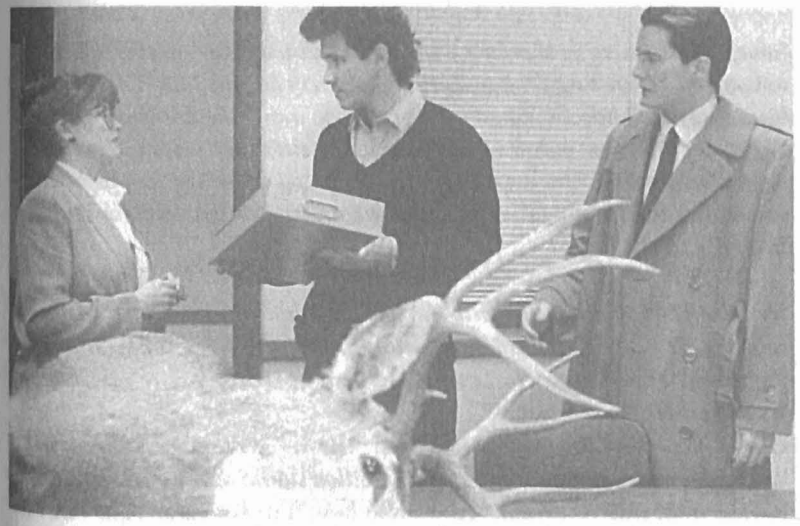
He starts out kind of straight – a little unusual maybe – and it's not until episode three, when he gives a Zen sermon to the Sheriff's Department in the forest, that you start to realize just how wacky he is. Where did that come from?
I went to this place in Hollywood where I met the Dalai Lama. And I got fired up about the plight of the Tibetan people. And I told Mark, 'We've got to do something.' And that whole scene developed out of meeting the Dalai Lama! And then it added another layer to Cooper.

At the time, Cooper seemed unique in the detective genre, because he uses his mind, his body and most importantly his intuition.
Intuition, yes. He's really a very intuitive detective.

And it becomes clear later on why that's absolutely necessary.
Yes. And it was allowed to grow and develop, in a way, but then other things happened because of having to solve the murder. So as it was growing, poisons were being introduced into the soil, and it was just a matter of time before they killed the plant.

The series continually plays with a confusion of outside and inside. Interiors are all bare wood; large stag heads rest on a table; the Lodge with its red curtains is in the depths of the forest, etc. It's raining inside the room when Leland confesses/realizes about killing his own daughter. Was that something that was in your mind?
Not really. The inside/outside thing is . . . I've never really said that, but that's sort of what life and movies are all about to me.

Can you say something about the sequence at the end of episode three, in which Cooper is told by Laura in his dream who killed her. We don't hear



Outside inside. Sheriff Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean) and Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) about to open another part of Laura Palmer's secret life in *Twin Peaks* (1989).

the answer but Cooper does. And then, at the beginning of episode four, he's forgotten!
That's a hair of a cliffhanger, and a red herring. And yet everybody's had that experience, like having a conversation under the influence of something late at night. You reach a point where you seem to know something. And the next morning, it's either absurd or you've forgotten it – or both! I could rationalize anything, almost. I don't know why those things happened. It was like a little bit of an opening to something that was mysterious and tantalizing.

The series constantly uses two shots that became very evocative, perhaps by virtue of their repetition: wind in the trees, and a set of suspended traffic lights, also swaying in the wind. How did those images arise?
Well, the intersection of Sparkwood and 21 was where Laura last saw James – or James last saw Laura. And these traffic lights are there. Snow and different temperatures mean that they have to be fluid. So they blow in the wind. And these traffic lights became kind of important. They were used again where Cooper says, 'All those murders took place at night.' So when you see this red light, or a light turning to red, and it's moving, it gives you a feeling. And then it becomes like the fan in the hall outside Laura's room. It makes you wonder. And it gives you the willies!

James is interesting in that he's a biker, and all the bikers in this town seem to hang out at the Roadhouse, listening to a very angelic Julee Cruise singing beautifully melancholic songs – as opposed to biting the heads off chickens!
Right! See, the idea was that the bikers in Twin Peaks were the intellectuals – the beatniks. The Jocks were the ones that were outside, listening to something completely different. They were very much a cerebral bunch of bikers! [Laughs.]

By now your relationship with Angelo Badalamenti seemed to be really cooking. It's impossible for people to think of the series without hearing the music, which seems to cement the kind of world you're interested in creating with Mark Frost.
Oh, it was cooking, for sure. We'd already written 'Falling' so, for 'Laura's Theme', I went into Angelo's office/studio and he said, 'Can you tell me what it is you want?' And I told him, 'I'm not sure.' And I'm talking to him and he starts, you know, writing and playing. The pilot episode had already been shot, so we were working to the picture. I can't remember the exact sequence, but I remember saying, 'It's got to build!' And

Angelo was building this thing, and it was *so beautiful* to me, I'm starting to cry! Angelo looks at me and says, 'What are you, crazy?' And I said, 'Angelo, that's so *beautiful*! I can't *tell* you how beautiful that is! And he's looking kind of confused. Several times after that Angelo has said, 'You know, David, I trust you, but I have never thought that that is as beautiful as you seem to think it is.' It was the one piece that just never got to him. He didn't think it was so hot.

The music also becomes important as far as the narrative is concerned. It's often when Julee Cruise is singing that other things start to happen. It's as if the music generates events or certain realizations, such as when the Giant appears and tells Cooper that 'It's happening again'.
Well, the songs existed before the scene, so there were a couple of songs there, and a lot of accidents as well. Cooper was there with Truman and the Log Lady, and Julee's singing. Bobby Briggs wasn't supposed to work that day, but he came by the studio to get something. We were getting ready to shoot this scene and I said, 'Bobby, you gotta be here.' And he said, 'Fine, great. What do I do?' And I said, 'You're just sitting right over here.' And suddenly these emotions came, and everyone was just overcome with sadness. Something was going on. You could feel it, like, 100 per cent. It was everywhere in the room, and it was overwhelmingly sad.

And then Donna starts crying. And Cooper sees this – he's the only one seeing the whole story. Maybe the Log Lady too. And then Bobby breaks. And you could see Donna feeling it – being moved by this abstract thing. But when Bobby gets sad and feels it, that was what did it for me. And he wasn't even supposed to be there. It was one of the coolest things, because if certain people get moved, knowing their character, then something is really happening.

Could you say something about the casting of the series? One very particular element seemed to be the presence of actors one remembered from films seen as a child: actors rescued from retirement almost, faces from the past which came with a certain amount of 'baggage'. Russ Tamblyn, for instance.
Well, Dennis Hopper threw a birthday party for me, and introduced me to Russ Tamblyn. And Russ said, 'We've got to do something together,' and I say, 'Russ, you know, I've seen you and I've gotta do it.' So he was in the back of my mind. Richard Beamer's name came up because he's a friend of Johanna Ray, the casting director, and suddenly everything says 'Yes'. And then a lot of people are unknowns, but you meet them and

talk to them and, pretty soon, they're perfect. And not only are some people perfect, but when you see their faces and the way they talk, you immediately change some lines and start fashioning – based on what they're bringing.

It's not that you set out to rekindle people's careers or anything. It's a weird process. Johanna knows an awful lot of people, and then it seems to me it's common sense, but so extremely critical, that you get the right person for the role. There might be several people that could do it, but you keep searching till you really feel that you've got someone that you can see in every scene and you're thankful they're doing it. So many names are brought up. You just run them through the mind, playing these scenes, and you hit something and, 'No!' You love this person, maybe, but it's a 'No', unfortunately.

Presumably, the casting of Laura Palmer was crucial. She had to be absolutely right, because everything spins around her. And yet she's primarily a corpse! The absent centre.

Right. That came about from a photo. We knew we were going to shoot in Seattle, and since this girl had no lines and was just dead we weren't gonna hire someone from LA and put them up and pay them per diems and all that stuff, just to play a dead girl. So she had to come from Seattle. I looked through many, many, many pictures and, bingo! There was this picture that felt right. So we had Sheryl Lee come in, but she didn't look exactly like her picture. With some people, you see a picture, and you get like a dream, and then when you see them the dream goes away. But the dream was still alive, so I started telling her I wanted to dip her in grey dye, and that she was gonna be dead on the shore. And she said, 'Fine.' She said later that she was really nervous, and was sitting on her hands. But no one – not Mark, me, anyone – had any idea that she could act, or that she was going to be so powerful just being dead. Or how important that small decision was.

How did she react to the role?

When we shot her it was freezing cold – I mean, it was *so* cold. And she lay out there, and then we'd have to take her away, where they had these blankets and heaters set up behind this giant log. So she'd run fifteen feet and go into this warm little tent and get her body temperature back up, and then go back and shoot. She was a great sport. And, you know, one day she was there, and the next day she was gone. But she was in every scene, mentally.

The image that launched a series. The dead Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) wrapped in plastic in *Twin Peaks* (1989).

At what point did it become clear that she could also play the role of her cousin, Maddie?
She did do another scene – the video with Donna on the picnic – and it was that scene that did it. I said, *'Man!'*, you know, 'She has got a presence and a natural ability.' She wanted to be an actress and she was in Seattle to act. But that scene did it all. That little dancing scene.

In a way, she seems to have been 'branded' by that role. Like perhaps Kyle with Agent Dale Cooper, or Frank Silva with Killer Bob.
Yeah, it's a double-edged sword. I'm sure, just by itself, it isn't going to stop anybody. It's just what happens next; if it's the right thing. It won't be about talent, it'll just be about fate.

What about all the other, relatively unknown, cast members?
Well, there's a story to each one of them. Like Andy. I was going to a tribute for Roy Orbison, and it was at the Fox Theatre. I don't usually get a car, but I said, 'I've got to get a car, because it's going to be crazy down there, and I just want to be able to get up and go in.' And so I hired a car to go, and the driver was Andy. He took me down there, and said, 'I'm going to be right here when you come out.' So he was driving me back and we were talking and he said he was an actor – like everybody in LA, right? And I'm looking at him, and we were just casting the pilot, and I'm thinking, 'Oh, my God!' So I said, 'You gotta call Johanna Ray.' And then I told Johanna, 'I want Mark to see this guy, and you to see this guy, but I think he's perfect for Andy.' It's so cool when suddenly there the person is.

I *was struck by the similarities between the discovery of Laura's body and Tim Hunter's feature film,* River's Edge. *And then he turned up as one of the directors for the series. How did he get involved?*
Well, it's a small world. We went to the AFI Centre together. He showed me all his early films, and they were fantastic. He had a fixation on the Shangri-las! And he did these films that were, like, so hip, and I really thought he was the guy that was going to go out and really do it. I've always been a fan of his.

How did you 'cast' the other directors for the series? It's a very precious thing, you have to be careful.
Yes, and it's hard for them, because they have to come in and obey these rules that've been set up. And Mark and I know the rules better than

anybody. So, again, it's tuning in. They have a script and they chat with one or both of us and away they go. And then I'd see their shows at the sound mix. If something was completely wrong there would be time to fix it. But I can't even say that that ever happened. I went to school with Caleb Deschanel and Tim. Diane Keaton I sort of knew, and some of the others were recommended, you know, and we saw their work.

You directed the pilot, and certain other crucial episodes. How did you go about selecting which ones you would do?
I just picked the ones I couldn't bear not to do. I knew I wanted to do the one with Leland/Bob. And there were a couple of others. I wanted to do the very last one – [laughs] – and the very beginning one! And all the ones in between! [Laughs.]

What was it like for you, working within the demands and constraints of television – both as a form and as an institution?
The power of most movies is in the bigness of the image and the sound and the romance. On TV the sound suffers and the impact suffers. With just a flick of the eye or turn of the head, you see the TV stand, you see the rug, you see some little piece of paper with writing on it, or a strange toaster or something. You're out of the picture in a second. In a theatre, when the screen is big and the sound is right, a movie is very powerful, even if it stinks.

For instance, no matter what I tried to do in the sound mix, it never sounded good on TV. We had great mixers, and worked really hard on getting things going. But the commercials were always ten decibels louder, and they came through like *gangbusters*! When you think about it, they break up the show, and people have got used to these little twelve-minute segments, then a commercial, a twelve-minute segment, then another commercial. And the commercials are very, very loud so people just 'mute' them anyway. I would turn the whole set off! What are they doing to everything? They're ruining everything with this! I don't know how anything can work when they're so destructive. But you're like a voice in the wilderness.

We're on the verge of high-quality, beautiful images that could be piped to the home, and I'm afraid a bunch of people are going to ruin it. You've got to be able to give a better chance for people at home to enter the dream, but TV is just for selling products. It's just a little rig for that. There were a lot of good people at ABC, but I really still got the feeling that what motivated their decisions had nothing to do with the show. And that's where I think they go wrong. The show is the least important part of their plan.

As you shot the series on 35mm, and edited it on film, were you not really thinking about where it was going to end up?
Well, you have to think about it because, if you don't, you're only hurting yourself. We would mix the episodes on the big screen, and then play them back through little TV speakers. Then you realize that the TV is shaking, and you have to filter out some of that bass. You have to mix finally to the TV, because that's where it's going. And if you don't, all kinds of strange things will happen in people's homes, and it won't come through the way you really want it to.

Were other aspects of the production, such as the look or colour, compromised?
No, but if you were able to magically visit 200 houses as *Twin Peaks* was playing, you'd see the colour 200 different ways. They send out the signal and everybody's got a different set of colours and brightness lined up. Some people have the brightness down so low that if you have a dark scene, you don't even see it, or cranked up so high that it's all grey and all snowy and coming apart. It's a terrible medium and you're just *aching* because you know the way it could be. I'm waiting for a TV that's not 1:33 ratio, but is able to show different formats: when the image is letterboxed, the TV just takes on a different shape. It would be way bigger, hooked in with fibre optics and beautiful quality.

Knowing your liking for CinemaScope, it must have been a compromise to have to shoot in a ratio more suitable for TV.
Well, I shot *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and *Eraserhead* in 1:85. But the rest are CinemaScope. I like CinemaScope better. It's harder to shoot in it, because the lenses aren't quite as fast, so there are little compromises, but it's a great ratio. Incredible. It's the ratio of the rectangle. Composing for it you can get some beautiful surprises. It's really rough when one person's lying down and one person's standing up. But it's great with two people lying down! It would be nice to have a ratio that changed as you went along.

It must have been intriguing to know that Twin Peaks *was being seen by so many people, compared to a movie in the cinema. Does that matter to you?*
See, these figures are based on a falsehood, so you can never tell if it's true. So right away you've got to question everything. But it's still way more people than go to my films. It was a surprise to me that so many people got into that show. It was really a pleasant surprise.

Did ABC market it well?
I believe marketing is important, but I believe way more in fate. People should do their best in the marketing, but there have been campaigns that have been tremendous and the film is a bust. The film – or programme or anything – has a certain smell to it. And a certain buzz on the street. I don't know what it is, but I think it's bigger. It's something to do with fate. It's your time to shine, sort of. The way is open, and you can't figure on these things. The timing and everything else on *Twin Peaks* was just right. It went *wild* at first. It surprised everybody.

How did you react to that sudden and massive popularity?
It's nice when people really like something you've done, but it's sort of like love, in that it seems inevitable that people reach the point where they've had enough of you and they fall for the next thing. You're helpless to control that process, and the awareness of it is like a dull ache. It's not like a sharp pain – it's like a little bit of a heartache, and that heartache is about the fact that we're living in the *Home Alone* age. Art houses are dying. What we have instead are mall cinemas showing twelve pictures and those are the pictures people see. Television has lowered the level and made a certain thing popular. That TV thing moves fast, doesn't have a lot of substance, has a laugh track and that's all.

I guess part of the problem is that TV audiences are such an abstract thing. They're completely invisible to the film-maker, whereas you can go to a theatre and see a cinema audience buying tickets and sitting down in front of your movie.
Exactly right. And theatres used to hold huge groups. I remember this guy – I think it was George Seaton, who did some Marx Brothers movies – came to the AFI and gave a seminar. The Marx Brothers would tour the country, and work these routines out on stage with a huge audience. The director would be timing the laughs, and found that no matter where they went, that particular line would get a four-second laugh, given a thousand people. So they'd cut the film to give time for a four-second laugh, and that affects the pace of a film. But an audience of a thousand people are going to fill that gap. When it's finally put on video, and you see it in your home, it seems very slow. It's weird that way.

Did you have to concern yourself with guidelines about taste and censorship when you were making the series, given that there are completely different criteria when working in TV?

Yes. We had this line in the pilot, when Bobby and Mike are drunk and driving over to see Doc Hayward – Donna's father. Mike tosses a beer can out and it lands somewhere in the street, and then he gets out of the car and Bobby says, 'Don't take any **** off that ****,' and the censor said, 'You've got to change that line.' I wasn't really dealing with that, and so someone reminded me, just as we were shooting that scene: 'David, you can't use that line, remember.' And I said, 'Oh,' and so that's where 'Don't take any oink oink off that pretty pig,' came from. It's just a dumb thing, but it made it cooler in a way. It wasn't the standard thing.

Some little fences are put up that are smaller than the fences you're used to. The ground is a little, you know, smaller. But there are nice animals in that corral and you work with them and you find pleasure working there. I was amazed just how big this corral could be for us with *Twin Peaks*, and what we could do. Very rarely did anyone say anything to us like, 'You can't do that'. We had a lot of freedom. Mark had been working in television on a popular show, so the combo smelt right to them, and we had a bit of a thing going with some power.

The series did go pretty far in terms of what might be acceptable to TV audiences: the murder of Maddie by Leland Palmer, for instance – a particularly violent episode that you chose to direct.

Oh yeah, that was a tough one, because in every country the censorship standards are different. But here it's like violence will get through nine out of ten times, whereas sex – any little sexual thing, you know – will hit the wall. There were some pretty strange and violent things in *Twin Peaks*, and they got by. If it's not quite standard it sneaks through, but it could be that the 'not quite standard' things make it even more terrifying and disturbing: the kind of thing they don't have names for. They're not in the book so they go right through.

There are similarities to Blue Velvet, *in that* Twin Peaks *is a lumber town and things are happening behind closed doors. But the new element here seems to be that the evil is not even of this world. It literally comes from beyond.*

Or it's an abstraction with a human form. That's not a new thing, but it's what Bob was.

When Bob appears, it's often in broad daylight. It reminded me of Jack Clayton's film, The Innocents, *in which the dead governess appears across the lake in bright sunshine. There's something very unnerving about it.*

Uncanny. As if the apparition hasn't learnt its proper place!

Right. Really unnerving. I think it's because at night-time you're prepared for something like that to happen. It would still be a terrifying thing, but in the daytime you figure – in the brightness of the sun – they're not going to appear. It's like in *The Shining*, when the kid's on his bike and he rolls around the corner and there they are! You know it's not right for them to be there at that time.

Do you think that the introduction of Bob helped to prevent the story from ultimately being just one of incest? Was that a worry?

No, it wasn't. What makes you worry about things like that is when you start thinking about what certain people might say about it later. Because you're not really sure what they might say. And if you start worrying, you could make some really strange decisions based upon that worry. The work isn't talking to you any more: this worry is talking to you. And you become paralysed. So the trick is: you've got to forget making a hero or a fool of yourself and just try to get into that world. And if you can do that, and you feel good about the decisions that you make, then you can weather whatever good or bad storm comes along.

The great thing about the presence of Bob is that Leland can almost remain a nice guy. He's not horrible, he's been possessed.

An abstraction in human form. Bob (Frank Silva) in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

He's a victim. Everybody that has done bad things is not all bad. It's just that one problem which becomes a little too great. People are always saying, 'He was such a nice neighbour. I can't believe he could do that to those children and to his wife!' It's always the way.

By the time we get to the answer – that it was Leland – it doesn't really seem to matter any more. By then it's clear that an evil force – Bob – is operating from within the 'host' character anyway. So pointing the finger at Leland isn't really an answer at all.

It's not an answer. That was the whole point. Mark Frost and I had this idea. The way we pitched this thing was as a murder mystery but that murder mystery was to eventually become the background story. Then there would be a middle ground of all of the characters we stay with for the series. And the foreground would be the main characters that particular week: the ones we'd deal with in detail. We're not going to solve the murder for a long time.

This they did *not* like. They did *not* like that. And they forced us to, you know, get to Laura's killer. It wasn't really all their fault. People just got a bug in them that they wanted to know who killed Laura Palmer. Calling out for it. And one thing led to another, and the pressure was just so great that the murder mystery couldn't be just a background thing any more. The progress towards it, but never getting there, was what made us *know* all the people in Twin Peaks: how they all surrounded Laura and intermingled. All the mysteries. But it wasn't meant to be. It just couldn't happen that way. The yearning to know was too intense. But the mystery was the magical ingredient. It would've made *Twin Peaks* live a lot longer.

On the other hand, that intense desire on the audience's behalf to find the answer to the mystery testifies to the impact of the series.

Yeah but, you know, it killed the thing.

So, in your original plan, the unmasking of Leland would have been much later?

Way, way later. And who knows how it would've unfolded then? But there'd be a yearning – maybe subconscious – to know. It's the same thing with *The Fugitive* [the TV series]: where is that one-armed man? Yet each week, you know, they hardly ever dealt with that. And that's the beautiful thing. You keep wondering, 'When will he find this guy and set everything straight?' But then you knew that would be the end.

But it made perfect sense, as the real killer was not flesh and blood, that the story could continue – almost for ever. It defies resolution. I sort of assume that Twin Peaks *is still there, it's just that no one is pointing the camera at it now.*

Right. That's a good way to think. I know that world and I love it so much. It's a real pull to go back and revisit it. Bob was one part of *Twin Peaks* that could've lived on and been dealt with in different ways.

But, as far as you and Mark were concerned, was it always going to be Leland who had carried out the deed?

We knew, but we didn't even hardly whisper it when we were working. We tried to keep it out of our conscious minds. Because it wasn't something we had to deal with right away. There were enough other things to give latitude to other problems. It just hung there.

A lot of people thought Laura's killer was Benjamin Horne. And the first day of the week that we were going to shoot that sequence with Maddie, we brought in Benjamin and Leland and we shot the same scene, first with Ben and then with Leland. So nobody – not even the crew – knew which one it was, because we were shooting for real – with Killer Bob in there and everything. I've got to say that Richard Beamer was really a great sport, because he knew it wasn't him. We told him, 'We're going to shoot the scene, but it's not you.' So he did it for real, like it was him, but he knew all the time it wasn't.

Was all that part of the desire to keep the answer from getting out to the public?

Oh, it would've leaked out in two seconds, yes.

But that actual episode was directed by Tim Hunter, wasn't it?

No. In my episode you learned pretty clearly that Leland and Bob were together, with the death of Maddie. Tim's episode was when Leland gets caught and dies.

Did Ray Wise, who played Leland, know all along?

No. He didn't know till we told him, that day in the office, just before the killing of Maddie scene.

By this time, Cooper has become almost like a priest, giving absolution to Leland. He's not really like a cop at all. And then he changes again in the next season, when he becomes more 'normal'.

In the second season, Cooper ceased to be 100 per cent Cooperesque for me. He got these flannel shirts and stuff! Some people maybe liked it. So you say, 'Yes, I'm glad in a way, and in another way I'm really sorry because a guy that's too much like me cannot sustain that intense interest or dream. He's got to be specific. Cooper is a certain way. It's necessary.' If you start seeing the Queen of England going round in a Volkswagen or something, it doesn't make it. It's gotta be a Rolls-Royce. That's what you want.

Why was Cooper possessed by Bob at the end? It seems like he's lost it.
Well, the thing is, he hasn't. It's the doppelgänger thing – the idea of two sides to everyone. He's really up against himself. People were really upset that it ended with an evil Cooper who'd been taken over by Bob. But that's *not* the ending. That's the ending that people were stuck with. That's just the ending of the second season. If it had continued . . .

Isn't it true that you were less involved in the second series, because you were off making Wild at Heart*?*
Right. That started . . . in the second season I was, you know, removed from it. Although I loved the idea of a continuing story, those stories have to be written, and every week you have to do another show, and pretty soon it catches up with you and you find you don't have enough time to get down in there and do what you're supposed to do. And it becomes something you don't really want to do.

Were you unhappy when you returned and saw the direction Twin Peaks *was taking?*
See, I'm not making a judgement on it. It's just not the way . . . If Mark and I had been working together, it would've been different. But we weren't, so it was the way it was. I went to a couple of meetings with writers, and things like that, but unless you're right in there and you're hands on . . . That's one of the frustrating things about TV: there are other directors, other writers, and other things that come in. It may be fine, but it's not what you would do. It's frustrating.

So had the last episode been written when you came back?
It was written, but when it came to The Red Room, it was, in my opinion, completely and totally wrong. Completely and totally wrong. And so I changed that part. A lot of the other parts were things that had been started and were on a certain route, so they had to continue. But you can still direct them in a certain way. But I really like that last episode.

So was Cooper occupied by Bob in the script before you changed it?
No, but Coop wasn't occupied by Bob. Part of him was. There are two Coops in there, and the one that came out was, you know, with Bob.

Didn't you hold a press conference at one time to get support for the continuation of the series?
Well, what happened was, the executives at ABC changed the night it aired. When *Twin Peaks* started, it was on a Thursday night, which was the perfect night. It had to be a week night, because people were talking about it the next day at their place of work. And it was a cool thing. Then they moved it to Saturday night, so by the time Monday rolled around it was too far away. It wasn't the same thing. I don't think the TV executives are as loyal to any one show as they are to an overall thing against the other networks. There's no way I can talk about what they did because it made zero sense to me. All I know is that they killed it by changing nights and then forcing the solving of 'who killed Laura Palmer'. The press conference was to point out that Saturday night was bad, and to ask, was it possible for any pressure to be brought upon them to bring it round to a reasonable time?

Why did they do it? Was it a simple matter of viewing figures falling off?
Yes. And that's a whole other thing. There's only x number of TVs that are hooked into the Nielson system, and they don't ever want to change that, because of 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it'. So it's not necessarily a true representation, and everybody knows that. But it works for the advertisers, it works for the executives, and so they keep it in place like precious, valuable treasure. But the whole thing is based on an absurdity. And the numbers were bad. They weren't terrible, but the numbers were bad because Laura Palmer's killer was found!

Was the cast upset, given that they were so into it?
They were and they weren't. You wish that everyone would be 100 per cent there. And some of them were. But some of them weren't. You start seeing what people are really like with a second season. It was so popular that the next obvious thing for a lot of them was the movies. Getting out there and getting on with it. Then they realize that they're saddled with this TV series. And each actor isn't in it all the time, so they get frustrated, and they start killing the goose that laid the golden egg. They could do all those other things and still be loyal and 100 per cent there. But I don't want to upset anybody. It's hard to tell the truth without upsetting people.

And who knows what the truth is? You only remember the things you want to remember. The truth is hard to get at.

Since Twin Peaks, *there's been an obvious increase in shows that focus on the paranormal, UFOs, weird stuff – like* Wild Palms, American Gothic *and* The X-Files. Twin Peaks *seems to have started something.*
People said *Wild Palms* had something to do with *Twin Peaks*. To me it had *zip* to do with *Twin Peaks. ZZZIP!* And all these rip-off things that came after didn't catch one little *whiff* of what *Twin Peaks* was, to me. But other people see similarities.

But immediately prior to Twin Peaks, *certain subjects or stories weren't a regular or popular feature in television schedules, and now they certainly are. In retrospect,* Twin Peaks *does seem to have helped to create an appetite for such material.*
Maybe so.

When you made the feature film Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me, *the overriding press reaction was that this was just a cynical move on your part to exploit a successful TV series. What was the reason for making that film?*
At the end of the series, I felt sad. I couldn't get myself to leave the world of Twin Peaks. I was in love with the character of Laura Palmer and her contradictions: radiant on the surface but dying inside. I wanted to see her live, move and talk. I was in love with that world and I hadn't finished with it. But making the movie wasn't just to hold on to it: it seemed that there was more stuff that could be done. But the parade had gone by. It was over. During the year that it took to make the film, everything changed. That's the way it happens, sometimes. And then there's this thing about turning on people. It's so natural, in a way. It happens to so many people.

Fire Walk with Me *was your first movie for the production company CIBY-2000, with whom you'd struck a three-picture deal. Given the series was so popular, I presume it was easy to get the film going.*
Yes. CIBY very quickly gave us the green light and we raced ahead. Counting the writing, filming, editing, mixing and final touches, less than a year went by from their agreeing to the screening in Cannes.

Making the movie was just a great experience, except I had a hernia during the entire shoot. I remember when it blew out. I was with Angelo and we were recording the soundtrack song, 'A Real Indication', and it

was weird because we'd done all the instrumental part of it, and it's a rap thing. And Angelo said, 'Let me give this a try,' so I went over all the lyrics with him because he wanted me to explain certain things. So I talked to him for a bit and he went in the recording booth. Angelo would make a great actor. To sing in public, or to let these things out and make it devoid of embarrassment, is a trick. And Angelo came to life in this booth. I was with the engineer, Arty Polhemus, and I was laughing so hard that something exploded. It was like a light bulb blew up in my stomach, and that was the end of my stomach wall.

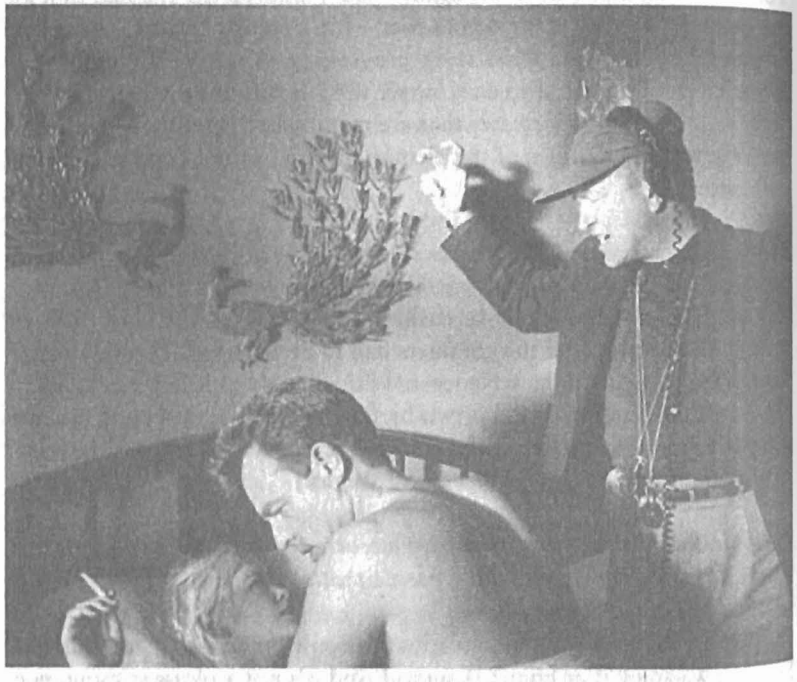
In part, adverse press and audience reaction to the movie was to do with the fact that much of the the humour of the TV series – the coffee, the doughnuts, etc. – had been dropped. All the niceties, and some of the characters, were gone. All that was left was this desperate . . .
Torment. Yes, that's true. But again I had a limit on the running time of the picture. We shot many scenes that – for a regular feature – were too tangential to keep the main story progressing properly. We thought it might be good sometime to do a longer version with these other things in, because a lot of the characters that are missing in the finished movie had been filmed. They're part of the picture, they're just not necessary for the main story.

Are you saying that if these other things had been included, it wouldn't have been necessarily quite so bleak or depressing?
It wouldn't have been quite so dark. To me it obeyed the laws of *Twin Peaks*. But a little bit of the goofiness had to be removed. There was stuff shot, like a scene with Jack Nance and Ed – the old guy that was killed in the bank. Ed has purchased a two-by-four and he's returning it because it's not two inches by four inches. There's a reason for that, and Jack has to explain it to him! Things like that. [Laughs.]

Perhaps the problem was that by concentrating on Laura Palmer's last seven days, the movie reminded people that at the centre of Twin Peaks *was a story of incest and filicide.*
Maybe so. Incest is troubling to a lot of people because they're probably, you know, doing it at home! [Laughs.] And it's not a pleasant thing, you know. Laura's one of many people. It's her take on that. That's what it was all about – the loneliness, shame, guilt, confusion and devastation of the victim of incest. It also dealt with the torment of the father – the war in him.

Seeing more of how the Palmer household was functioning just before Laura's murder did make me think about her mother, Sarah – whether she suspected her husband. It's like the wife of Peter Sutcliffe, the so-called 'Yorkshire Ripper'. I'm sure many people suspected that at some point she realized what was going on but said nothing.

Well, you can put yourself in her place. Maybe there were some things that didn't add up around the home, and she glossed them over because it's hard to look closely at something. And then there are a few more indications – things that are troubling – abstractions, just feelings, around the house. And then maybe you find something, or you see something, and a kind of knowing happens. And then so much that you can't hide any more. And then there's this question of whether you should do something about it. And that's a really hard thing because, if you do, and it doesn't pan out – because there's no really hard evidence – you could anger this



The murder that started it all. Lynch directs Ray Wise (as Leland Palmer) and Pamela Gidley (as Teresa Banks) in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

person and you're the next one that goes! Or you might be wrong, and then what have you done to this person? It's better just to wait – possibly – and hope that it stops, or that he's caught by someone else.

The movie plays a lot with notions of time. For instance, Dale Cooper is mentioned in a scene, but he hasn't come to town yet.

Exactly. Although I don't really like talking about things, I've got to say this one thing about that scene – where Annie suddenly appears in Laura's bed. This is before Laura has been murdered, and before Coop has come to Twin Peaks. Annie appears, filled with blood, and wearing the exact same dress that she's wearing when she was in The Red Room with Cooper in the series – in the future. She says to Laura, 'The good Dale is in the Lodge. Write it in your diary.' And I know that Laura wrote that down, in a little side space in her diary.

Now, if *Twin Peaks*, the series, had continued, someone may've found that. It's like somebody in 1920 saying, 'Lee Harvey Oswald', or something, and then later you sort of see it all. I had hopes of something coming out of that, and I liked the idea of the story going back and forth in time.

How did the cast react when you went back to do Fire Walk with Me? *Were they all enthusiastic?*

No. I wish that was the case. Some people felt that way. And then some people felt the opposite. It was 75 per cent, you know, very good. But that 25 per cent . . . You just say, 'Why is this happening? It could be so great.' And attitude is so much of it.

Parts of the movie had a certain 'theatrical' look characteristic of many of your films. The Red Room, with its all-encompassing curtains, feels very much like the scenes in the radiator in Eraserhead, *in this respect.*

Right, exactly. [Laughs.] Why is that? Who knows? I've got a thing about curtains and I don't know why, because I've never done any theatre. But I *love* curtains, and a place where you look and it's contained. I just really love it. I don't know where it comes from. I've done a lot of these watercolours that have curtains on the sides, and I don't know what it is. There's something about it. The seven veils. Stuff like that.

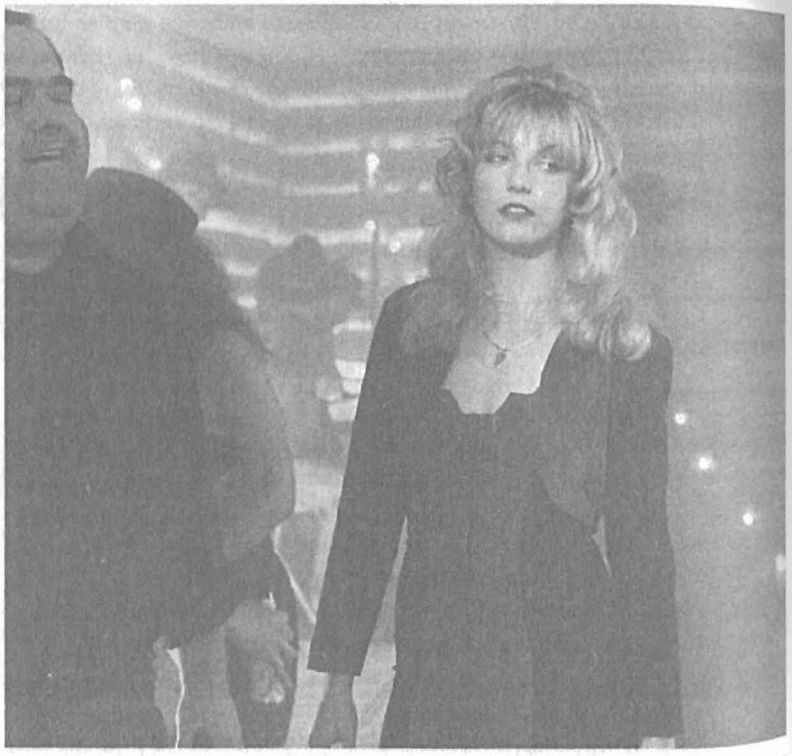
One of the most striking scenes is the one in the disco. Not only is it the ultimate 'club' scene – the disco from hell – but the sound mix is particularly ingenious. The characters are yelling at each other, but you can't hear a word they're saying. Exactly the way it is in a club when you're

trying to have a conversation. But the real mystery of the scene is undercut by subtitling the dialogue. Was it always your idea to subtitle that sequence?

Yes!

I thought it might have been some stupid distributor's idea!

No, it was my stupid idea! Not to subtitle it would be second best in my mind. There were certain things that needed to be heard and understood. At the same time, I can't stand to pot out the music so you can hear the dialogue. In a club you can't hear anything, but you can hear something if the person's yelling, and that was the idea. So the music was cranked to the max and people were really talking loud enough to be heard, so it worked. So the music is at ten and the dialogue is at two, but you don't



Heard and not heard. Jacques Renault (Walter Olkewicz) and Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) get down and dirty at The Pink Room disco in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

worry about it, because you can use subtitles.

The dialogue starts out kind of strange but, in the second half, Jacques Renault starts talking about Laura's father. Laura can't really hear it: she hears the words but she can't deal with them. And she's saved from dealing with them at that moment by these other guys coming in. But she could have realized that her father was involved with something that he shouldn't have been. So that scene was all about how, in a small world, everything would eventually come back to her through some route or another. It was coming to her right there. All the players were there. I love that idea.

You wrote the music for that scene. How did that come about?

Well, I went in with this group of guys because Angelo was out in New Jersey, and I just got into an experimental thing. I'd met them before when we did some stuff for *Ronnie Rocket*. And when you go in the recording studio it's so fantastic, but you never know what you're going to come up with. These guys could play anything and I had an idea for a bass thing. So I'm talking to the bass player, and we're working out this really simple bass thing that just repeats. Strong. And then the rest of the guys pick up on that and you noodle around until it gets to be a thing.

I wanted a certain guitar player to come in, but he wasn't available. And the drummer told me about this other guy, Dave Jaurequi, who had just come up from the islands. So he brought him in, and I said to Dave: 'It's like dark, fifties chords laid over the top of this,' but he didn't listen to me. I'm really glad he didn't because he just started feeling it, and he put on this incredible top. It was, like, so in the groove! Later we called the piece 'The Pink Room'. And we did another track called 'Blue Frank'. It's like painting: if we'd stayed in that room, we could have done ten things that lived together.

The press conference for the world premiere of Fire Walk with Me *at the Cannes Film Festival in 1992 doesn't sound like a happy experience.*

No, it wasn't. I've probably blocked most of it out. But the big news was that I'd finally completely killed *Twin Peaks* with this picture. And there was a hostile environment around the place. Once you go into a room, and people are very angry and upset, they don't have to say anything: you can just feel it. I felt it when I *landed* down there! [Laughs.] I got really sick and the doctor had to come up to the hotel room in the middle of the night, and the next morning I had my press conference. It was like I was made of broken glass, you know, when I went in there. And it really was not fun.

Didn't anything go right?
Well, even the parts that were fun backfired. Mr Bouygues, who set up CIBY-2000, threw this giant party, but a lot of people didn't like him. And he was suffering from a serious ailment. So they wanted to rope him off so he wouldn't be bumped by people. So we got roped off in this area, just to have a calm place for Mr Bouygues. And a lot of people outside the area were very upset that there was one area for him and another area for them. Instead of everybody just having a good time, it became like a political kind of thing, and it backfired bigtime. Michael Anderson and Julee Cruise performed and that was great. If the film had gone over it would've been beautiful.

When your work gets a hammering, how do you protect yourself?
The biggest protection is to feel that you did something that you like. That protects you a lot. It's when you don't like what you've done, and other people don't like it, then it's a double whammy. It's *very* bad. And then there's often something in the air that keeps people from actually seeing the work for what it is. There's something else that's maybe not real that they're reacting to more than the work. If some time goes by, they see the same thing again but now it's more worthwhile. That happens sometimes.

I feel bad that *Fire Walk with Me* did no business and that a lot of people hate the film. I really like the film. But it had a lot of baggage with it. It's as free and as experimental as it could be within the dictates it had to follow.

Did that experience make you rethink anything about your movie-making?
I just hope that I get a chance to keep making pictures in the atmosphere of freedom to make mistakes, and to find those magical things. Then I don't care what else happens. I would like the people who invest in the pictures to make some money, and to be happy they went along.

8

It's a Great Big Wonderful World

Wild at Heart and Weird on Top

1990 was Lynch's *annus mirabilis*: *Wild at Heart* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, and the television series *Twin Peaks* was proving a smash hit with audiences across the world. The musical/performance piece *Industrial Symphony No. 1*, which Lynch had staged with Angelo Badalamenti at the Brooklyn Academy of music, had spawned the album *Floating into the Night* and launched singer Julee Cruise. Five one-man exhibitions between 1989 and 1991 emphasized Lynch's roots in fine art and painting, and a rash of ads (including a teaser trailer for Michael Jackson's 'Dangerous' tour) confirmed the demand for the Lynch touch. Phrases such as 'Renaissance Man' began to surface, and his relationship with Isabella Rossellini was frozen in an image of weirdo hipness by photographer Annie Liebowitz.

In an unlikely scenario for the maker of *Eraserhead*, Lynch had become an influential and fashionable brand name. In 1991 *Parkett Magazine*, a heavyweight contemporary art publication, conducted a 'Parkett Inquiry' entitled '(Why) Is David Lynch Important?'. The resulting ten-page spread canvassed thirty-two artists, writers, cultural commentators and theorists including Jeff Koons, Kathy Acker and Andrew Ross for opinions on Lynch's (in)significance.

Ironically, Lynch had always been very uneasy with the concept of the fashionable. After *Easy Rider* had won its own prize for Best First Film at Cannes in 1969, and while the American film industry was still reeling from its impact on audiences and industry alike, Lynch was in the *Eraserhead* bunker – oblivious or impervious to Dennis Hopper's impact on Hollywood boardroom thinking.

As Peggy Reavey remembers from their time at the Pennsylvania Academy: 'We may have been the only students in the sixties who didn't take acid! David likes to play in that "by George" area, and he's got lots of folksy sayings. He hated being in style, and that's all part of it. He didn't walk around in black turtle necks; he dressed in baggy pants and buttoned-up shirt collars. He didn't wear jeans because that was the thing to do. David hated trends. What's happened now is that he sets them.'

Wild at Heart, adapted by Lynch from a novel by Barry Gifford, was quick to get started. Its success at Cannes was at a time when American cinema was again beginning to dominate the festival prizes – as it had done in the late sixties and early seventies. And, like so many other US Palme d'Or winners, *Wild at Heart* pictured a society on the verge of self-immolation. But Lynch's 'free' adaptation of the novel, transforming Gifford's tale into a catalogue of bizarre and often

extreme violent encounters, proved too much for preview audiences. Even when Lynch cut back on the sheer enthusiasm that seems to infect the movie, it was greeted in some quarters as Lynch doing Lynch: supermarket surrealism; off-the-peg weirdness.

Gifford, who had nothing to do with either the script or the film, sees it differently. 'All kinds of journalists were trying to cause controversy and have me say something like "this is nothing like the book" or "he's ruined my book". I think everybody from *Time Magazine* to *What's on in London* was disappointed when I said "This is fantastic. This is wonderful. It's like a big, dark, musical comedy."'

In truth, *Wild at Heart* – almost impossible to resist as a piece of film-making – tends to hit and miss in equal measure. The excesses of weirdness, such as Mr Reindeer, sit uneasily with the terrifying emotional charge of such scenes as the car crash featuring Sherilyn Fenn, or the 'say "fuck me"' scene between Bobby Peru and Lula. These two moments represent Lynch at his most affecting, the latter being a quintessentially Lynchian approach to rape – conducted at the level of language. However, the film fails to achieve his usual perfect synthesis of the extremes of dark and light; humour and dread. It also shows that his very trust in intuitive film-making can sometimes produce the most sublime moments as well as falling wide of the mark. The brightly coloured, shiny surface of *Wild at Heart* and the visual 'noise' it generates are an exception in Lynch's feature output, as is the uncharacteristically 'healthy' sexual abandon in which the movie delights.

Previously, American independent cinema had not been the natural home of violence – seen as the province of the major studios. *Wild at Heart* prefigured a drift on the part of the independent sector towards a more brutal, visceral cinema that was to culminate in *Reservoir Dogs*. All of this was symptomatic of a feeling in the country that dramatically expressed itself in, of all places, Tinseltown with the LA rebellion of May 1992. If *Wild at Heart* seemed dangerously chaotic and shocking at the time, it only underlines the possibility that in 1990 Lynch the radio was perfectly tuned.

RODLEY: *When exactly did you leave the* Twin Peaks *TV series to start filming* Wild at Heart?

LYNCH: Well, I'd shot the *Twin Peaks* pilot, and we'd shot the first season – another seven episodes. I remember that when we were mixing *Wild at Heart* up at the Lucas Ranch, we would watch *Twin Peaks* at night. So *Wild at Heart* was probably finished around the time ABC aired the fourth episode of *Twin Peaks*. Somewhere in there. That meant I had a very peripheral attachment to the making of the second season. It was a painful decision to leave it at the time, but there are only twenty-four hours in a day.

After your bad experiences on Dune *– including the difficulty of adapting*

a pre-existing work – you had returned to your own ideas as source material. Why, with Wild at Heart, *did you go back to a book for inspiration?*

Well, I had lost some projects to Dino's company and I was trying to get those back in the hope of making one into a movie – a process that went on and on for several years. So I was looking for the next film, and my friend Monty Montgomery gave me a book that he wanted to direct as a movie. He asked if I would maybe be executive producer or something, and I said, 'That's great, Monty, but what if I read it and fall in love with it and want to do it myself?' And he said, 'In that case, you can do it yourself.' So I said, 'OK. I'd love to read it.'

This book was *Wild at Heart* by Barry Gifford. And I read the book, and it was just *exactly* the right thing at the right time. The book and the violence in America merged in my mind and many different things happened. So my hand goes to the phone and I call Monty and I say, 'I really *love* this thing. I really want to do it.' And that's how it started.

Did you find it difficult to accept that your own movie ideas were in fact owned legally by someone else?

It's a terrible thing, Chris.

Protection of 'intellectual property' has always been a difficult issue.

Yeah, and ideas are strange because they're sort of not yours. They were somewhere, then they came into your mind and became yours, but they weren't before. But the person who catches the idea should get the lion's share of what's coming down the line, and it's the reverse these days.

What was so inspiring to you about Gifford's novel?

Sailor and Lula were such great characters. Sailor was very masculine and yet he respected Lula and was able to stay strong himself. And he kept her equal to him in his mind. And she was totally feminine and, you know, respected Sailor and kept him equal to her. So they were side by side in this strange world, being themselves and being comfortable with each other being themselves. So I saw this as a really modern romance in a violent world – a picture about finding love in hell.

Like a lot of your movies, it's also a cross-generic work, isn't it? Something that always causes problems in terms of critics and audiences.

Yes. *Wild at Heart* is a road picture, a love story, a psychological drama and a violent comedy. A strange blend of all those things.

In adapting the book for the screen you made a lot of changes, and Gifford wasn't involved at all in the screenplay. How did he react to your version?
I was worried because I was going to be adding certain things to it. Barry's work inspired so much. But he got excited about these things. Some writers would be devastated by such changes and start buying weapons and stuff. But Barry said, 'Look, there's going to be my version and your version of *Wild at Heart* and that's great. Take the ball and run with it.' For me, again, it's just a compilation of ideas – the darker ones, the lighter ones and the humorous ones all working together.

You not only wrote the script very fast, but the film went into production almost immediately. Something must have been working well.
Right. I remember Steve Golin, Monty Montgomery and Joni Sighvatsson – the producers – reading the script. They were all pumped up about it. I told them that I wanted to rewrite some stuff but that, while I was, maybe they wanted to get started on it and then we'd be underway. It was one of those things that once it started it was like a fire. It just burst into being.

Although the spectre of The Wizard of Oz *may have haunted aspects of your previous films – naming Rossellini's character in* Blue Velvet *Dorothy, for instance –* Wild at Heart *is full of explicit references. Why?*
I love *The Wizard of Oz* and somewhere along the line it struck me that Sailor and Lula would be the kind of people that could embrace that kind of fairytale and make it really cool. The world in the film was awful tough, so there was something beautiful about Sailor being a rebel but a rebel with a dream of *The Wizard of Oz*. And the characters of Sailor and Lula, having this dream between them, were pleasing.

And then it started leaking in everywhere. I remember writing a line for Jack Nance's character, O. O. Spool, about the dog: 'And you may even picture Toto from *The Wizard of Oz*.' The idea that someone else was speaking about something that Sailor and Lula shared secretly was a double whammy. It fits in with the theme, but it's scary at the same time. I loved the way *The Wizard of Oz* kind of snuck in and out of *Wild at Heart*: with Marietta's picture disappearing at the end; when Bobby Peru is with Lula and she clicks the heels of her red shoes together; the Good Fairy at the end.

What exactly is it that you love about The Wizard of Oz*?*
There's a certain amount of fear in the picture, as well as things to dream about. So it seems truthful in some way. It must've got inside me when I first saw it, like it did with a million other people.

For many it must have been something to do with the comforting conclusion that 'There's No Place like Home'. Home is seen as the ultimate refuge from all worry and fear – exactly the reverse of the homes in your movies!
[Laughs.] Right. But the family in *The Wizard of Oz* weren't Dorothy's *real* parents. So it's all very strange. It makes you crazy! [Laughs.]

Lula is something of an exception in your female characters; she's not a masochist, she's not dead and she's not mysterious in a threatening or inexplicable way. In fact, Lula is a great woman's part.
Yes. That's what got me in Barry's book. Something about Barry's book captured a woman that's, you know, really strong and filled with understanding. And is still a really fun-loving babe!

Having seen Laura Dern as the naive and almost totally innocent Sandy in Blue Velvet, *I was surprised by your casting of her as the very hot Lula in* Wild at Heart. *At the time that seemed like radical casting.*
No. For me it was Laura all the way though. A lot of people found that inconceivable. They knew and respected her work, but they couldn't see her playing Lula. But every character is made up of so many little subtleties, strange choices, odd little ways of saying a word. Lula is a hard character to get a handle on, and bubblegum has a lot to do with keeping her on track! I just pictured Laura as Lula, and Nicolas Cage as Sailor. They seemed to be perfect together.

I took them to dinner early on, when they hadn't even met each other, and there was a huge fire on Beverley Boulevard at the Cinematheque. That was weird, the fire on their first meeting.

There's a recurring motif of fire and striking matches all the way through the movie. Why did that image become so important to you?
Well, Lula's father was killed in a fire and, in my version, Sailor was outside in a car when that happened. And her own mother was involved in his murder. There's a lot of smoking going on too. So fire plays a big part in Sailor and Lula's relationship, and matchsticks became one of the elements that united them but which also threatened to destroy their relationship. And through all this, they stay locked on each other – they understand it and they're above it in a weird way. Modern *love*, man, it's so fantastic! They're human, and subject to all kinds of human desires, but they have a forgiveness of each other for being the way they are. But to articulate these things with dialogue is sort of a drag. You stay too much on the surface that way.

Fun-loving babe. Lula (Laura Dern) in motel hell in *Wild at Heart* (1990).

Home-loving babe. Dorothy (Judy Garland) and adopted family in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).

You mentioned cigarette smoking. At times the movie almost looks like a tribute to nicotine!

That came out of the book, but I elaborated on it. Lula asks Sailor, 'When did you start smoking?' In the book he said 'Six', but we changed it to 'Four', because those two years make an absurd, funny difference!

It wasn't just 'Four' though, was it? It was 'Four. Just after my mother died of lung cancer'!

Yes, and Lula says, 'Oh, I'm sorry!' 'That's OK,' he says, 'I didn't know them; they weren't around much!' [Laughs.] It's just, like, one thing after another! This poor bastard has had a life that's not unlike millions of people's lives. That's another thing I liked about the story: it caught this word 'Wild'. It was like I was feeling it. Now I feel it a hundred times more. Now we've gone from 'wild' to 'insanity'. The world is coming unglued.

Wild at Heart *is quite different from a lot of your other movies, in that it's very much on the surface, very colourful, very fast and very busy. Was this style intended to reflect that sense of lunacy?*

Yes. Now we're kind of getting used to the world being crazy, but I swear to you, in 1988, or '89 or whenever it was I first read the book, it wasn't so much like that. The world is always kind of the same, but we keep *thinking* it's getting worse. Maybe one day we'll think it's getting better, but it just seemed to me at the time that it was getting crazier. And that's one of the things I loved about the book. The insanity of what was happening around these two people could be pretty exciting.

That insanity is established in the very first scene with an incredibly violent and shocking murder. Was it always your intention to hit the audience very hard from the get-go?

Yes, but in the script that particular scene happened at the end of the film. There was going to be another, equally powerful, scene at the beginning with a giant motorcycle going really, really fast. But there are speed bumps on the road. So you have a man out of control and then speed bumps – the one thing you don't want! But for some reason – again it's fate – we didn't get around to shooting that scene. Since we didn't have that, the editor, Duwayne Dunham, came up with the idea of moving this other scene forward to give the movie the same kick-off.

But that scene triggers the rest of the action. How could it have come at the end?

I can't remember exactly how it was. The scene might have gone up to a certain point in the action at the beginning and then returned in flashback later, more complete. Again it comes back to the fact that the movie wants to be a certain way.

Road movies, by definition, often have a dramatic problem. Did you want to play extensively with the flashback device in order to keep dramatic tension?

It would have been easy to remove them, but I didn't want to lose them. We worked hard to solve this problem of going from one place to another and crossing regions of strangeness, without losing sight of the main direction.

You also made some changes to the novel regarding the unhappy ending, didn't you?

Well, Barry's book ends with Sailor walking away from Lula, and it depressed me. And it honestly didn't seem real, considering the way they felt about each other. It didn't seem one *bit* real! It had a certain coolness, but I couldn't see it. When Sam Goldwyn saw an early draft of the script he said, 'I hate this ending,' and I said – it just popped out of me – 'I hate that ending too!' [Laughs.] And so he says, 'Why don't you change it?' and I said, 'I'm going to change it, *doggone it*! Even if you don't end up distributing this, I'm going to change it.'

So you didn't change the ending to a happy one in order to give the film more commercial potential?

No way. But I had this problem. It is much more commercial to make a happy ending yet, if I had not changed it, so that people wouldn't say I was trying to be commercial, I would have been untrue to what the material was saying. Sailor and Lula had to be together: the problem was figuring out how they could be together and still have the scene where they part. In the end that problem was helped by *The Wizard of Oz* thing. So the problem was just going ahead and doing it and not worrying about people saying, 'Well, David's sold out.'

Like Blue Velvet, *the film is a very heady brew of extreme brutality and humour, perhaps even more so.*

I understand when people say that the things in the films are strange or grotesque, but the world is strange and grotesque. They say that truth is stranger than fiction. All the strange things in the films are triggered by this world, so it can't be all that strange. The thing I love most is absurdity. I

find real humour in struggling with ignorance. If you saw a man repeatedly running into a wall until he was a bloody pulp, after a while it would make you laugh because it becomes absurd. But I don't just find humour in unhappiness – I find it extremely heroic the way people forge on despite the despair they often feel.

The extreme nature of the hilarity and horror in the film makes it seem more crudely surreal than, say, Blue Velvet. *Some critics said it was David Lynch doing a David Lynch, in that respect.*

But I think the American public is so surreal, and they understand surrealism. The idea they don't is so absurd. It's just that they've been told that they don't understand. You go anywhere and old-timers will tell you very surreal stories with strange humour. And everyone has a friend who is totally surreal.

This is something I see everywhere – I look at the world and I see absurdity all around me. People do strange things constantly, to the point that, for the most part, we manage not to see it. That's why I love coffee shops and public places – I mean, they're all out there.

There's also a lot of sex in the movie, as well as violence. But it's much more playful than the corrupted couplings in Blue Velvet.

Well, another thing I loved about Barry's book was that Sailor and Lula were so free when it came to sex. In a perfect world, men and women would be different, but they'd be equal. There was so much freedom and so much happiness and so much equality in that relationship, as crazy as they were. And Nick Cage and Laura Dern were mentally in line with that. In reality, some parts of them were close to Sailor and Lula, and so the sex scenes were, you know, really wild and fun. They could do anything with each other and it wasn't twisted. It was just like the book *The Joy of Sex*, you know! [Laughs.] It was nice.

Orson Welles is supposed to have said that there are two things you can't really do in cinema – sex and praying.

I don't agree with that, but I think both are pretty tricky!

What was it like directing a road movie?

The thing about it is I really hate camera cars – except, on this, we were supposed to have great, great camera cars and people that knew how to make them work quickly and safely. And we had this great scene, 99 per cent of which was not used. It was one of those days where we were just

Equal but different. Sailor (Nicolas Cage) and Lula (Laura Dern) put some miles on the bedroom clock in *Wild at Heart* (1990).

shooting car driving scenes. You've got to be on location at six a.m. It's still dark. So we're out there and the guys are rigging the car. OK, good. I've got my doughnut and coffee, and the whole day planned out.

Now it's eight a.m. and they're still rigging. That's not so bad: two hours. At ten-fifteen I start talking to Steve Golin. I say, 'Steve, *strap* me onto the car; we're shooting this thing!' And he says, 'David, there's no way we're strapping you onto the car. You'll get killed, our insurance people will go crazy, it's completely against the law, and it's my responsibility. Go and talk to the first AD and he will tell you you cannot be strapped to the car.' I say, 'Steve, if they're not through by eleven-thirty, I'm going on the car.' And he says, 'You're not going on the car, David.'

Now it's after lunch – a *long* lunch – they're still rigging. At three-thirty in the afternoon we finally start shooting this scene and the sun goes down and we lose our light. We lost the whole day.

And there's a lot of that in Wild at Heart.

Yes. So whenever I *do* get on a rig, and it's working, I play as many scenes as possible, even if it's completely the wrong locale, you know? I

just play them in case something goes wrong later. [Laughs.]

I was reading an on-location report in which Willem Dafoe said what fun it had been to make the movie because he would suggest things and you would always say, 'Let's try it.' You seem to enjoy playing with aspects of performance.

Well, first I've gotta say that Willem gave a flawlessly perfect performance from start to finish. Bobby Peru was a one-of-a-kind character and Willem nailed it like nobody's business! But there's other stories – like with Kyle on *Blue Velvet*: while goofing around Kyle does this chicken walk that he carried over from high school. And I just went *nuts*! And so it was introduced into the walk with Sandy. It's just the kind of goofball thing you do with a girl. You do stupid stuff but they like it! It just bloomed out his character, doing that! Actors are doing stuff like that all the time but you don't wanna let them run wild. [Laughs.]

The British actor Freddie Jones seems to pop up regularly in your work.

I love Freddie Jones. He's one of the greatest human beings on the earth! Freddie Jones. I *love* that guy! [Laughs.]

In Wild at Heart *he makes a very strange little appearance as a bar room character called George Kovich. Why such a bizarre and brief cameo?*

Well, originally he had this huge monologue that was from Barry's book about pigeons – rats with wings. And Freddie was so fantastic! But it was so *funny*, I was just, like, dying! I had to wear a cowboy hat, dark glasses and a kerchief across my mouth – I couldn't stop myself from laughing! I knew it was wrong. And if I didn't lose it, Laura would lose it. And then one time Nick lost it. And sometimes Freddie would lose it. It was just one of those things where it got worse and worse [laughs] because each actor at the bar – Freddie, Nick and Laura – were all being their characters so much!

Was that the reason it had to be dropped?

No. It was dropped because it was too much of a good thing. It went on and on and on. So we cut it down and cut it down and kept experimenting with different parts of it and it ended up the way it is now. But one time Duwayne was running the scene on the Kem and he was going fast-forward, and I heard Freddie's voice speeded up. And I almost *passed out*! I said, 'I'm gonna do that!' And I called Freddie in London and I said, 'Freddie, I gotta tell you, most of the scene's cut out and I wanna raise the

pitch of your voice.' And he said, 'David, do whatever you want. I'm sure it'll be fine.' I said, 'Thank you! *Thank* you, man!' And so that's how that came into being. [Laughs.]

He's a great actor. In *The Elephant Man* he played a very serious, troubled person, but he has a humour to him and a vulnerability and a way of saying things that just drives me *crazy*. I love the way he talks and I love his worries and his compulsions. He's an actor's actor. His whole life is that.

We've talked before about the very powerful car accident scene with Sherilyn Fenn. Another particularly memorable and uncomfortable confrontation is the 'Say "fuck me"' scene between Lula and Bobby Peru. How did that arise?

I don't know how it happened exactly. In the book it's really Sailor and Bobby Peru that cook up everything. Lula's outside of the whole thing. But it seemed that if they were equals, that Bobby Peru – the 'Black Angel' – would tempt both of them. I don't know which came first, the scene or that thought, but it just kinda wrote itself. That sometimes happened with *Wild at Heart*. Like with the car crash scene. Sherilyn Fenn always reminded me of a porcelain doll. And to see a porcelain doll broken . . . I kept talking to her about that and the scene came about.

You had some very adverse reactions to the picture in early test screenings. What exactly was happening, and why?

Some of the scenes were quite violent. At one of the test screenings 300 people left, out of maybe 350! [Laughs.] One scene, in particular, was going too far. And it reached a point where the scene not only took people out of the movie, but it made them very angry. So they turned on the picture, and then physically left the theatre. It's one of those things you learn from screenings. You could call it a compromise to change something in order to keep people from walking out, but I just think that one scene went too far.

Which scene was causing the problem?

The torturing and killing of Johnnie Farragut, played by Harry Dean Stanton.

And yet test audiences could accept Bobby Peru blowing his own head off with a shotgun?

Yeah. That was tough too, but that was near the end and, on the surface, Johnnie didn't really deserve what he got. Bobby did. Plus there's a hair of

Say: '"Fuck me".' Lula (Laura Dern) feels the breath of Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe) in *Wild at Heart* (1990).

Sitting around thinking up horrible things. Harry Dean Stanton (as Johnnie Farragut) discusses a scene with Lynch on location for *Wild at Heart* (1990).

humour throughout the picture except with Johnnie; the humour was kind of gone there. The blend we were talking about was really putting people off. But after we altered that one tiny bit the audience was with the picture. I guess there is this magic line that you can go up against but if you cross it you're in big trouble.

Did those bad reactions to the film surprise you?
A little bit. Everybody has a line which they won't cross over, but it's different for each person. I didn't think I'd pushed it to the point where people would turn on the picture. But, looking back, I think it was pretty close. But that was part of what *Wild at Heart* was about: really insane and sick and twisted stuff going on. Just like in real life, you know?

I don't want to give the impression that I sit around thinking up horrible things. I get all kinds of different ideas and feelings. If I'm lucky, they start organizing themselves into a story – then maybe some ideas come along that are too eerie, too violent, or too funny, and they don't fit that story. So you write them down and save them for two or three projects down the road. There's nowhere you can't go in a film – if you think of it, you can go there.

Some critics have commented in retrospect that the violence of Wild at Heart *– not a common thing at the time in American independent production – now seems to have been very much in tune with a climate in Los Angeles which was to blow very soon after the film was released.*
Well, when I first read *Wild at Heart* it was well before the riots, and they didn't follow immediately after the film. But there was craziness in the air and people were picking up on it. It's as if the mind is a top: it starts to spin faster and faster and then, if it starts to wobble, it can go *wildly* out of control. Everybody feels it. It happens in traffic – people lose their temper. And you can't even relax at home: the television is sending out more stuff, and it's just mounting and mounting. It's like you're riding in a 747; you have no control if something goes wrong. So people are out of control, and filled with fear.

What was it like in LA during the rebellion?
Well, the smoke was coming right up over the mountain: they were setting fire to Hollywood Boulevard. There was a feeling that something had gone drastically out of control and there wasn't a thing anybody was doing about it. You got the feeling that anything could happen. And that was very unnerving. And it's surreal to see five thousand fires burning, and

people on TV almost acting for the news cameras as the looting and strangeness was going on. Everybody got strange.

But did the anger and craziness really start to ease off after that?
Well, sure, because it released so much stuff. And then people start getting together: getting involved and trying to help. There's a calm after the storm; it's kind of nice. So you could say some good came from it. But I don't know if people learn from the past. They're just doomed to repeat the past again and again and again. It's stupid, but it happens.

Do you think it was inevitable that something was going to crack sooner or later?
Oh, yeah. Looking back on it, you see exactly why it happened. Misunderstandings can only go so far.

If you saw the world as 'wild at heart and weird on top' at the beginning of the nineties, and you think it's continuing to get worse, what do you think is causing it?
I'll tell you what it is. Each year we give permission for people to get away with more. We do it by being disorganized, being without leadership, not making decisions fast enough, and not holding true to things that were in place to begin with. Then it gets easier to give more away. I don't know when we started giving it away, but it reminds me of *Dune*: I started giving something away early on – only just a little bit. And then I'd give away a little bit more. Pretty soon you've got a problem.

It's nothing to do with right wing or left wing. That gets in the way too. Somehow, by thinking we're being more understanding or something, we're actually giving away some really important things; giving permission to do things that are hurting people, and then hurting ourselves. I don't know when it's ever been good, but it might've been better. We've got to contain everything long enough to get a new plan, and that plan has gotta recognize all voices. Maybe it means having the police in the streets everywhere for five years, just to prevent anything horrible happening while we get it together and make everything more fair. But we're not doing that and something's slipping away.

It's like downtown LA, which was a beautiful, beautiful city: the quality of the buildings there, and the extra mile they took to make it utility but with a beauty on top of the utility that they didn't have to do. Now these buildings have slipped to the point where you have to almost level them: you can't fix that kind of disrepair. If someone had started fixing things ten

years ago, they could've saved the whole building and kept it really beautiful.

But this has nothing to do with the choice between a Democrat or Republican leadership for you?
No. Unfortunately, it's got to transcend that kind of thinking, and start talking about something that everybody can get behind. A leader can inspire people overnight if they say the right thing in the right way. But now, even though the words are there, the power is missing. It just seems that the second politicians get through talking, others start picking it all apart and it washes away and it's nothing.

But that's an almost impossible job.
Yes, but I'm wondering if it's not even really what they say, but the way they say it, and what's inside them as they say it. It's like the head's been chopped off and the body is just, you know, bleeding.

Did you perceive any difference at all when Clinton became President?
For me, the pendulum swings when you've had enough of one thing. You feel that any extreme can only last for a little bit and then the pendulum will swing back. It's just a natural thing, like the waves on the ocean. It'll always be that way – trying to find that beautiful balancing point, which is impossible. You can't hold on to it in this world.

What are the most worrying manifestations of that lack of balance now?
The atmosphere gets stranger, and you pick up on that. Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies get affected by it, whether you realize or not. There's a tension in the air, and it's not going away: it's building. And there's a feeling that you can't plan for the future. You think more short-term: get it while you can because the way things are going it ain't gonna be there after a while. So you don't clean up after yourself. You don't build things that are beautiful, you just slap something together and it's like a tent instead of a house. Everything is like junk. There's no joy to building. Just look at these modern places: you walk in and you don't have a euphoria, you just wanna puke! And the rugs are all bleeding out formaldehyde, and there's toxic crap everywhere. [Laughs.] You're shot down in the street, and you can't ride on the freeway. I almost have a heart attack on the freeway! People drive, like, four inches apart at seventy-five miles an hour, and the speed limit's fifty-five. Everybody's right on the edge.

Get it while you can. Sailor (Nicolas Cage) and Lula (Laura Dern) at a gas station stop in *Wild at Heart* (1990).

It's like being locked in a building with ten maniacs. You know there's a door somewhere and there's a police station across the street where they'll take care of you, but you're still in the building. It doesn't matter what you know about other places if you're stuck in the building.

You seem to be talking from a very pessimistic point of view.
No, I'm such an optimist I can't tell you! But we've got to overcome a lot of inertia; we've gotta be optimistic that it could all turn around.

You won the Palme d'Or at Cannes with Wild at Heart *at the very point* Twin Peaks *was making a huge splash on television. A rare double whammy for any film-maker.*
I know! Winning at Cannes was the worst thing that ever happened to me. [Laughs.] But it was really beautiful because when we went to Cannes I went to a festival that I had always just loved. Because, you know, Fellini's been there and it's the South of France, with chalk-blue water and yellow ochre hills. It was *incredible*. I had such a lightness in my heart. I was just there, *soaking* it up. And then to top it all off with winning was *unbelievable*! But I had the reverse experience going back there with *Fire Walk with Me* in '92, so things do balance out.

As well as having a hugely successful TV series and a Cannes winner on

your hands at the time, you were also doing a number of other things. You made a little foray into pop promo-making with Chris Isaak's 'Wicked Games' – featured in Wild at Heart *– and later a teaser for the release of Michael Jackson's* Dangerous *album. But since then, you've pretty much dropped doing them. Why?*

Well, there's something about being locked into a song. I guess, if I heard one that just really screamed out for particular images, I might want to do it. In a music video, at least up to now, there's been no dialogue, there are no other interim sound effects, or any silence. It's just the song, and you pack it with a billion, you know, one-second cuts. Some of them are super-creative and really seem to support the song. But a lot of people's criticism is that now they can only see those pictures when you hear the song, and before that the song really made you dream.

But you did end up staging your own ambitious pop music/performance piece with Angelo Badalamenti and Julee Cruise called Industrial Symphony No. 1: Dream of the Broken Hearted *in New York. What triggered this move into live theatre?*

Well, every year the Brooklyn Academy of Music have this thing and they asked me and Angelo to do something for them: two forty-five-minute performances in this most beautiful theatre – the real McCoy – they don't make them like that any more. It had levels way below the stage, seventy-five feet above, and huge wings. Everything you could think of could be done there.

We were given two weeks' prep to stage something. So I got this idea, and did a bunch of drawings. Little Mike from *Twin Peaks* was in it, and a lot of other people. I was just finishing *Wild at Heart*, so I got Nick Cage and Laura Dern to do this phone conversation on film – in which this guy is telling his girl that he's leaving her – and that starts the show. A choreographer came in and she had this man and woman who were incredible so we introduced them into this piece. Julee Cruise was the star, and she sang these songs that Angelo and I had written. I would've liked to have introduced more elements into it, but it was really fun because you're just making stuff up fast.

What was the reaction from the musical/theatre establishment to a film-maker staging such an event?

I heard some negative things. My daughter Jennifer was in the audience and somebody behind her said, 'David Lynch should never show his face in public again!' [Laughs.] I don't think much was made of it. But I think

the video of it did pretty well. I don't even know if there was anything written about it. It kind of came and went.

That night my Aunt Edna came and she was kind of the star of the post-show. We'd been looking for each other and a lot of the people working with me were also looking for my Aunt Edna. And then these doors opened and Aunt Edna came out and she looked like Roy Orbison with blue hair, sort of! She had this kind of *fantastic* hair! And dark glasses. She was beautiful! Unbelievably beautiful. She stole the show.

I recall Julee Cruise saying that your direction to her was along the lines of: 'You're on stage, it's dark, and you can't see the house. You're lonely.' That indicates an intention to produce a certain tone for the show.

Yes, there was a tone to it, for sure. But it was my first live thing and I learned that *many* things go wrong and many, many, many *more* things *almost* go wrong. Propaganda Films helped to produce it, and when the camera crew arrived, I could see them talking to Steve Golin and Monty Montgomery. They're whispering, and they steal a glance over to me. And I'm working – we're trying to rehearse in the afternoon and we've got, like, *no* time. And I'm rehearsing it more like a film: starting at the beginning and working things out as I go. And meanwhile the hand on the clock is starting to *fly* around, and hours are like minutes.

Finally, I get wind of what these guys were talking to the producers about: someone comes over to me and says, 'Can you raise the intensity of the lights, because we don't have an exposure?' And I said, 'There's *no* way. This is for a live audience: the film is secondary. And it's got to be a certain way. If we do that, it'll look great on film, but in here it'll be too bright.' So Monty turned around and said, 'David, you just lost us $50,000.' So there was, like, a lot of tension. But then I found out that the film exposure problem wasn't as bad as they thought, so we just tweaked the lights up a little bit, and they were super-happy.

Rehearsals are important in film-making, but for theatre they're essential. You have no chance to do a retake! How did you work with the lack of time?

Well, they came and told me that my rehearsal time was almost over. Not that rehearsal time was over for now, and we could do some more the next day – rehearsal time was *over*. The next time this thing's on stage, there are going to be two thousand people in the theatre! So I got this idea, which I think is a good one for anybody who's in this situation. Go to every person involved, hold them by the shoulders, bring them close to

you and look into their eyes. Then tell them exactly their cue to come on, and every single thing they do; what they might see as they're doing it; what they should be thinking; and when they should leave. Get them to know their own part. And then just pray. They don't have to know what everybody else is doing: they just have to know what *they're* doing. Then you have a chance. No one had ever seen the whole thing together anyway, and no one ever knows what the whole thing means! Then the stage manager becomes the king after that.

All the sound was digital, and it was on a VHS cassette, and we rented this big box that translates the VHS cassette to sounds and sends it down the wires to the big speakers. But in the rehearsal this thing stopped! And the people who brought it said they didn't know why. That's the wrong answer! That means it could happen again. And so we instantly got rid of that. Now all we had were two DAT machines. So we put these little bitty DAT cassettes in each one of these. The idea was to start them both playing at the same time, but only broadcast through one so, if one DAT went bad, we'd kick over to the other one. And so these *tiny little* DATs put out the entire show – and it was pretty loud in some places. It worked out, fortunately.

And then we had this skinned deer on stilts that was about fourteen feet tall. We hooked these two hospital gurneys together and the guy inside the deer had to lie out on this. At a certain point, this thing had to come to life, but the guy had been lying down so long that when he was thrown up in the air on the stilts – and these lights are on him and he has to move around – all the blood rushed out of his head. He couldn't tell what was happening so he just starts going . . . [Laughs.] I'm so far back, on these microphones, that I can't do anything. It was like, you know, observing an accident from too far to help, and it's the *worst* feeling. He starts walking [laughs] and then he starts walking faster, but he's not walking now – he's on the beginning part of a fall. And he's going towards the orchestra pit! Thank God this guy was there – Fuji, the snare drum player. He gave up his snare drum and caught the guy before he killed himself. He caught this falling deer [laughs] – actually broke his fall. And the audience thinks it's part of the show. All I said was, 'Get the deer off the stage!' [Laughs.]

But then the guy in the skinned-deer suit wouldn't go on in the next show. I had to go back to the dressing room but he wouldn't say anything to me. He just sat there. So I had to talk to him and tell him to give it another try, and promised to keep the lights out of his eyes – Little Mike was going around, shining a light right up on his head, and it was blinding him. This guy knew stilts, so I told him, if he had to, he could hold on

to this huge water-tank structure we'd built on stage. So, in the second show, he was really holding on to stuff. It wasn't quite the same, but he knew what had almost happened and he wasn't gonna let that happen again.

You also began making a lot of commercials around this time, many of them for classy, expensive fragrances, like Yves Saint Laurent's Opium, *Calvin Klein's* Obsession *and* Gio *for Giorgio Armani.*

Right. That one was my favourite. Giorgio called me up himself and said he'd got a new fragrance and to come up with something. So I wrote this thing which was almost like a little poem, sent it to him, he sent me the money, and we're shooting it! Apparently, he loved it, and it did well for the product.

What do you like about making commercials?

Well, they're little bitty films and I always learn something by doing them. I like doing the ones for Europe way better: people there give you way more freedom, they're more laid-back and they enjoy the shoots. American companies are much more uptight: their jobs are on the line and they really worry. It makes it a lot less pleasant. And I'm not against them. I'm not trying to do my own thing, I'm just trying to do what I think is right to sell a product. But I do like to be in on the way they're done: the storyline and the way they'll flow. I guess I had the most freedom on 'Who is Gio?'

That was an ambitious sixty-second piece.

Yes, we were shooting the big scene, with the musicians and the club, the night the riots broke out in LA. Inside the club we were all races and religions, getting along so fantastically, and outside the club the world was coming apart!

The commercials that were most surprising to me were those for Georgia Coffee because they were set in Twin Peaks *and featured many of the cast in a continuing story about a Japanese man called Ken who seems to be in Twin Peaks looking for his missing wife . . .*

. . . Namoi. Yeah. He'd lost her. Those were really fun to do. They were only thirty seconds apiece – four of them – things have gotta move *real* fast.

Was it at all a concern to take something like Peaks *and make an ad that might undermine some of the seriousness or magic of the series?*

Yes. I'm really against it in principle, but they were so much fun to do, and they were only running in Japan and so it just felt OK.

So you wouldn't have done them if they were for the American market?
No, I don't think so.

Were they being shot in tandem with the Twin Peaks *series?*
They were either done during the second season or maybe after it was over but still running in Japan.

Presumably you were approached by the coffee company to do them because the series did so much for the general 'profile' of coffee?
Oh yes, definitely. Georgia Coffee is a canned coffee. There are like 150,000 different canned beverages, or something like that, in Japan, and new ones coming out every week. It's a huge business. But Georgia Coffee is the most popular canned coffee, and they've got all kinds of different flavours. But the canners did not like the commercials we did. They wanted them to be more traditional and that's why they didn't continue. We were supposed to do a second year, and do four more thirty-second spots, but they didn't want to do them.

Around 1990 you seemed to be everywhere. You had a successful TV series, a Cannes winner, a weekly comic strip, a stage show and album with Julee Cruise, and a lot of work in commercials. Did you have an enormous burst of creative energy at that time?
That was a burst of fate! I was always doing a bunch of stuff, or always ready to go to work. But sometimes fate, you know, doesn't open that door. The light is *red*. But as soon as you're given the opportunity to do something, and then something else and something else, you're doing it. But you're headed for the big fall. Everybody reaches this point where things start turning on them.

Do you think that's inevitable?
It's a human nature thing. Except you don't think it can happen to you. It's like death. But it does happen, and then you get reborn again. It's kind of nice in a way, as painful as it is, because it puts you in a place where you at least have the freedom to go in another direction.

You also had a relationship with Isabella Rossellini at the time, which may have contributed further to a 'David Lynch, darling of the media' image.

Did all that make you nervous at the time?
Success is a beguiling devil and you're not smart enough to know what that means, and then some part of you sees the guns getting loaded and the rope getting prepared . . .

Is that the sound of a lynch mob? Nicolas Cage (as Sailor) and Lynch on the set of *Wild at Heart* (1990).

9

Ants in My House

Lost Highway

In contrast to the speed with which *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* raced into production in 1991, it was to take Lynch four years to get another movie off the ground. This was partly to do with the problem of finding the right project – something Lynch could fall in love with – and the poor response from both critics and audiences to the *Peaks* movie. Inevitably Lynch was now considered something of a risk, particularly for any project that might be too costly or 'difficult'.

Among the projects that failed to attract finance was the feature *Dream of the Bovine*. Lynch had written this with Robert Engels, who had penned ten episodes of the *Twin Peaks* television series and had co-written the movie version with Lynch. After this, their various collaborations were all based in comedy. *Dream of the Bovine*, according to Engels, is about 'three guys who used to be cows. They're living in Van Nuys, trying to assimilate their lives. Trying to live with us. They look like people, but they're cows. They do cow-like behaviour. They like to watch cars drive by the house and stuff!'

The rejection of *Dream of the Bovine* and the Lynch/Frost script *One Saliva Bubble* has so far deprived audiences of a David Lynch comedy feature. Yet humour is a cornerstone of the Lynch persona. The nearest equivalent is perhaps *The Cowboy and the Frenchman*, a twenty-two-minute video piece commissioned in 1988 by *Figaro Magazine*/Erato Films as part of a series made by international film-makers on the theme 'France as Seen by . . .' Representing Lynch's only venture into the Western genre – in which he has little or no interest – it is firmly rooted in his favourite kind of comedy. Characteristically, this is often based on misunderstandings and the failure of language, and is 'very absurd and *really* stupid. I love that combo, but apparently nobody else does!'

But in Bob Engels, Lynch found an ally, evident from their first meeting, to discuss his writing for the *Twin Peaks* television series. 'We were supposed to meet back at two-thirty, and I said: "That's when the Chinese go to the dentist!" It's the first joke I remember knowing, and the stupidest. David laughed and said: "That's a great joke!" and after that we got on like "Ike and Mike".'

The early nineties was a period in which Lynch, still in partnership with Mark Frost, became increasingly involved in television. *On the Air*, a sitcom set in 1957 and based at the Zoblotnik Television Network in New York, featured a fine cast (including some *Peaks* regulars) and some brilliantly skewed writing (Engels

was again involved, now also as co-executive producer). However, its heady mix of the 'absurd and stupid', crude slapstick and wayward intelligence proved disastrous. Although seven shows were commissioned, *On the Air* was off the air after only three. As Lynch admits: 'During that time everything was going belly up with *Twin Peaks*, and there wasn't any support from ABC for this show *at all*. They really hated it.'

Hotel Room, a trilogy of short plays set in Room 603 of the Railroad Hotel in New York City, was made for HBO. Again, these seem to have been greeted either with indifference or alarm. The two bookend shows – *Tricks* (set in 1969) and *Blackout* (set in 1936) – were both written by Barry Gifford and directed by Lynch and are compelling pieces of work. *Getting Rid of Harry* – written by Jay McInerney and directed by James Signorelli – was the odd man out: a light, humorous piece that perhaps sugared the pill of Gifford and Lynch's dark, mysterious and pared-down visions of quiet desperation with room service.

Tricks – a disturbing three-hander with Freddie Jones, Harry Dean Stanton and Glenne Headly – and *Blackout* – a mesmerising two-hander with Crispin Glover and Alicia Witt – are remarkable for the essential spareness of Gifford's writing, the respect Lynch affords the text (a two-camera set-up observes the action, rather than creates it), and the power of the acting. In their simplicity, occasional menace and beautifully contained sense of panic, both prefigure aspects of what was to be Lynch's next movie, *Lost Highway* – inspired by a Gifford phrase, and their first collaboration as co-writers. *Tricks*, in particular, contains distant echoes of the movie in its concerns with confused identity and uxoricide.

Of Gifford's writing, *Booklist* once said: '[His] night people are a strange mix of utter weirdness and bedrock humanity, rampant eccentricity and absolute individuality. Some things in life are beyond analysis, and Barry Gifford is one of them.' No wonder, then, that Gifford and Lynch should finally fuse so successfully with *Lost Highway*, a film as narratively ambitious and, according to Gifford, as close to *Eraserhead* as anything Lynch has achieved: 'I think *Lost Highway* is a very serious film, which is why I personally relate it more to *Eraserhead*. I think it's kind of a moving portrait. I didn't realize this until I began watching dailies. Then it struck me what was going on.'

Much has been said about *Lost Highway*'s narrative structure, a complex cross-weave of parallel worlds and identities that refuses to yield its many secrets easily. This has prompted some critical confusion and hostility. Like Lynch, Gifford is loath to describe the film in terms which make its mysteries too legible: 'I guess it's fair to say that it's really about a man who finds himself in a dire situation, and has a kind of panic attack. He has a very difficult time dealing with the consequences of his actions, and this fractures him in some way. I think it's a very realistic, very straightforward case study of one person who is at a loss to deal with the way things have turned out. But there's a whole lot more in it. Any kind of explanation is going to be inadequate, because a film is made to be seen.'

RODLEY: *There's a four-year gap between the making of* Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me *and* Lost Highway. *Why has it taken you so long to get another feature project off the ground?*

LYNCH: I tried to get some things going, but for one reason or another nothing ever happened. It's a matter of finding something that you fall in love with. You can't make a movie for money or any other reason than that you just fall in love with the material, and you're excited about it. Otherwise you'd never be able to sustain the trip.

But presumably you'd been in love with many ideas in the intervening four years.

Yes, but if you could put into words the symbolic equivalent to most of my visual concepts, no one would probably want to produce my films! I don't know what a lot of things mean; I just have the feeling that they are right or not right. And there's another thing about fate. Sometimes fate smiles on you and certain things don't happen. I wanted to do *The Dream of the Bovine*, but it probably shouldn't have been my next film after *Fire Walk with Me*, even though at times I really wanted it to be. It just didn't happen. There are certain things that are allowed to happen and certain things that aren't. *Lost Highway* felt correct, not only to me but to other key people who could make it happen.

Isn't one of your long-treasured projects an adaptation of Kafka's Metamorphosis*?*

Yes. I've got the script of that. It needs a little bit of work, but I like it a lot. Unfortunately, it's expensive and it won't make any money.

Why do you think that?

Well, I suppose it could, but it's pretty wordy. There's a lot of dialogue, and also a lot of *unintelligible* dialogue that I would need to subtitle. It would almost be like reading a book. [Laughs.]

What's your particular take on the story?

In my mind I'd be doing the book, but I've moved it to the fifties – '55 or '56. But it's really an Eastern European version of '56, even though it's in America. And I have rock 'n' roll coming into it in a fringe way. Kafka's like anything else: with ten people doing the same story you'd get ten completely different angles on it. My angle is the correct angle! [Laughs.]

You've obviously continued to paint, and have expanded your photographic work in several new directions. I'm intrigued by Clay Head with Turkey, Cheese and Ants, *a colour photograph which appeared on the cover of the second album you and Angelo Badalamenti made with Julee Cruise. What is happening in that image?*

Well, I had ants in my kitchen: they were sugar ants, but they were coming in for water. So I made a small human head of cheese and turkey and encased it in clay and mounted it on a small coat hanger. I exposed some turkey in the mouth and in the eyes and in the ears. I knew the ants would go for this stuff and, sure enough, the next day they'd already found it, had the highway built, and were going into the eyes and the mouth. Just *racing* around this head, carrying off little bits of turkey and cheese and coming back for more.

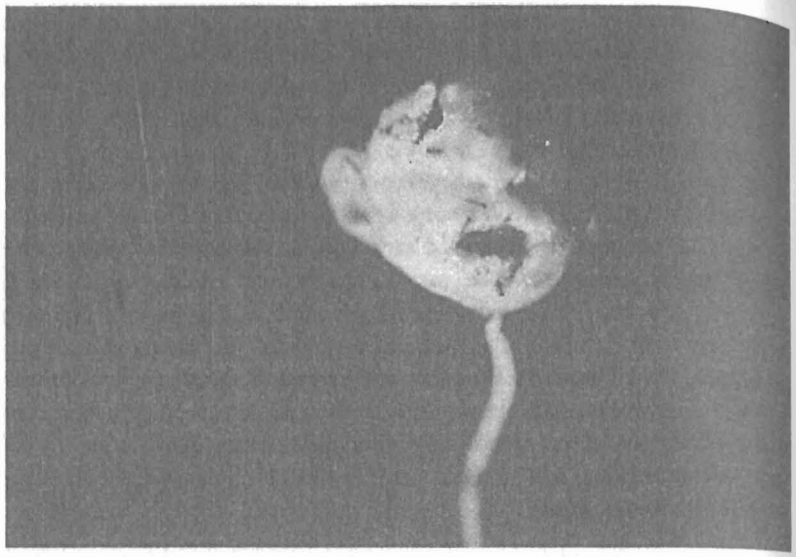
They were working for me twenty-four hours a day and they cleaned the inside of the head of every little bit of food in four days! Ants, as we know, are tireless workers, so if you can get a project they can do, they'll do it with no questions asked.

Another photograph called Man Thinking *features a small toy figure, but this time his head is all mashed up – as if God had become bored and didn't finish him off properly.*

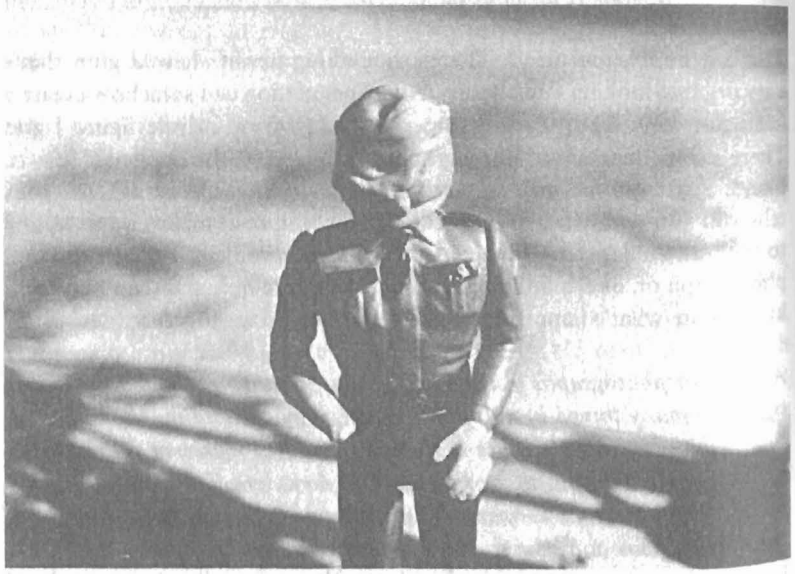
That's a bubblegum head. There's something about chewed gum that's very organic-looking – it's fleshy. Your imagination can somehow create a head out of it. So I just put some chewed gum on a little figure I got. There's something about photographing miniatures; the depth of focus is, like, a quarter of an inch when you get down there. Your subconscious tells you you're down in a different-sized world, so it makes it interesting to look at. And because of the depth of focus problem, I'd take another photograph of, like, a building, and put the figure in it and then you don't know quite what's happening. I like those two things together.

A series of photographs you took in 1993 of snowmen in Boise, Idaho, triggered many things in my mind. Again, they are strange-looking creatures subject to decay because of the sun. And they represent the creativity of the people living in those houses. One wonders if they look like the people living there, as they stand almost on guard in the front gardens of these neighbourhood houses. They're very resonant.

In Boise, it snows quite a lot in the winter. Very rarely does it get good and deep, but people build these snowmen in front of their houses. And there's a certain standard way of doing it. But what amazed me was the variations on the theme. I don't know who built the first snowman, but they always

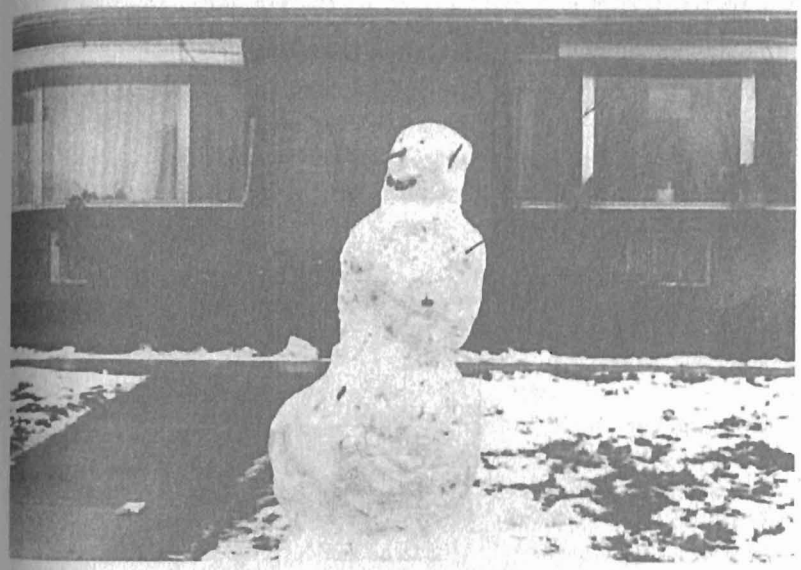


Clay Head with Turkey, Cheese and Ants (1991). Photograph by David Lynch.



Man Thinking (1988). Photograph by David Lynch.

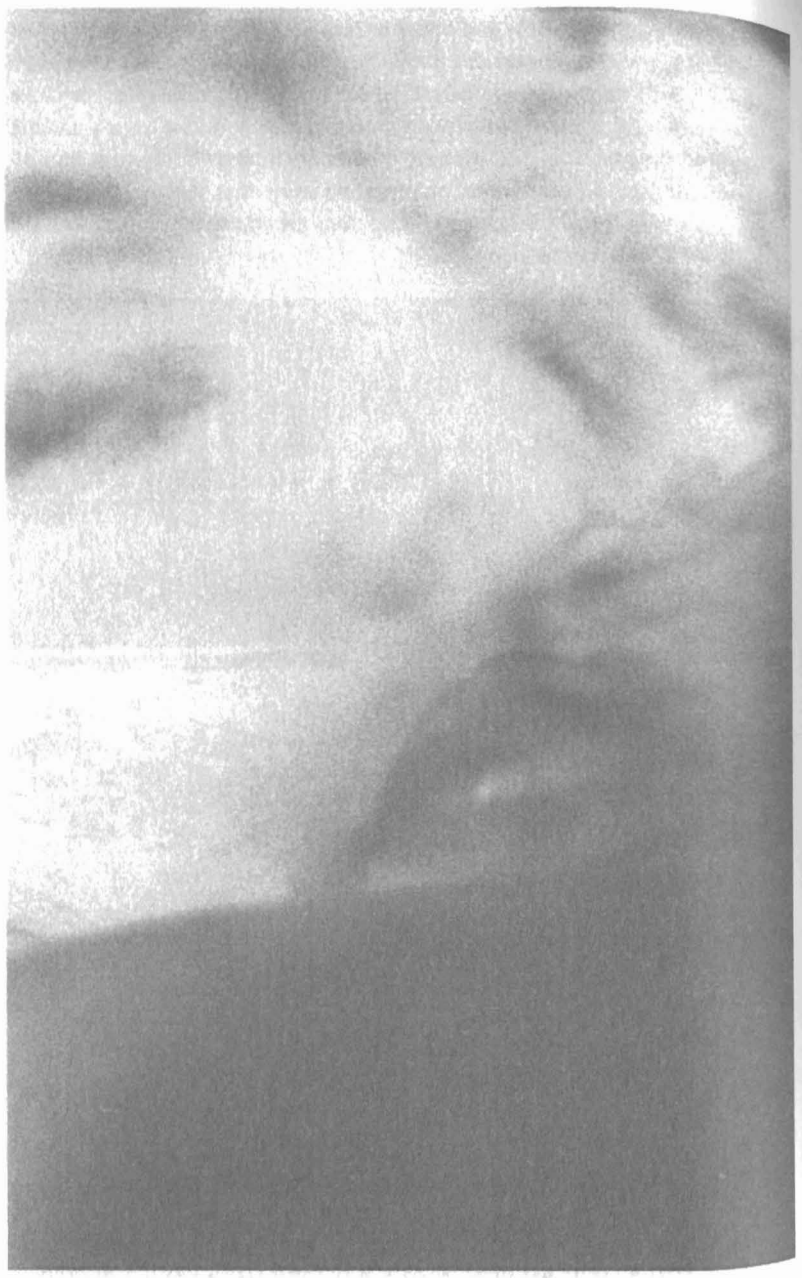
had coal for eyes and you'd put a pipe in there, and you'd put a muffler on him. That's gone right out the window now. People do much weirder snowmen. And then you say, 'Man! These are really interesting,' because they're made out of snow, which is a material that you don't get a chance to work with too often. And it really makes the human body look fantastic. I would like to take more pictures, because the houses *behind* the snowmen are also really interesting. And then the snowmen themselves are like aliens. *Really* fantastic images.



Boise Snowmen (1993). Photograph by David Lynch.

Another photographic series is Nudes and Smoke *which – uncharacteristically – is in colour. In one respect they're almost straightforward photographs of female nudes, but they're very mysterious because of the smoke element. It's almost as if the women were producing the smoke from inside their bodies, as if they were literally smouldering.*

That came out of cigarettes, sort of. But then it went one step further: why not just pure smoke? Smoke obscures things. And it's another texture. It seemed like a good combo, so I got a smoke machine from my friend, special effects expert Gary D'Amico. He's got, like, a hundred different smoke machines. I like black smoke, but there's no such thing any more. The only way to really get black smoke is to burn tyres, but it's so toxic it isn't *funny*.



Nudes and Smoke (1994). Photograph by David Lynch.

Nude photography – male and female – is now so overdone it's almost bankrupt imagery. Did you want to do something different with it?
That's the wrong way to think. The only good way is to get a thrill with an idea and then go out and do it. If you start thinking about how it's going to be received, or if you're going to be able to do something new, you're worrying about the wrong thing.

There's a very menacing and mysterious image in Lost Highway *where a lonely little puff of smoke comes up the stairs of a darkened house. It could have come straight from one of these photographs. What attracts you to smoke?*
Smoke is so active: it never stands still and it's subject to any little breeze, so it's always changing. But the camera freezes it. Things that move are really interesting to see in a photo because they can't move any more. You could take a million photographs of some smoke and each one would be thrilling. And some would jump out as just that much stranger or more beautiful.

Lost Highway *is the second of your three-picture deal for CIBY-2000. Obviously, they felt this was the next one to go with. Did you write the script and say, 'This is what I want to do,' or did you talk to them about the project first? How does the arrangement work?*
I talked to them about it before Barry Gifford and I started writing, but they didn't know what it was because *we* didn't know what it was. I think we wrote a treatment first but CIBY are funny because it takes a long time to get them to OK a project. Once they OK it, they're fantastic, but we finished the script in March '95 and weren't shooting till November. That's a long time to make up your mind and do budgets and talk. I really wanted to shoot in the summer, but then it was winter and we were freezing in the desert!

So where did the idea for Lost Highway *come from?*
Well, Barry Gifford wrote a book called *Night People*, and in it a character used the phrase 'lost highway'. I mentioned to Barry that I just *loved* this title, 'Lost Highway', and that we should write something together. And he said, 'Well, let's do it.' That was about a year before we actually got together on the script. But that phrase, you know, sparked it.

What was it about that phrase that excited your imagination?
It's just a dreamy thing – 'Lost Highway'. It evokes all kinds of things in your head. And then later on I found out that Hank Williams had written a song called 'Lost Highway'.

Given that you both had nothing more than two words to go on, did it come together easily at first?
No. We both sort of had our own ideas about what *Lost Highway* might be. We got together over coffee and I told Barry some things I was thinking about and he told me some things he was thinking about. And we each hated each other's ideas! And we hated our own ideas after that! Then I told Barry about this series of things that came to me one night. The very last night of shooting *Fire Walk with Me* these things shot into my head. I was driving home with Mary Sweeney and I told her about them, and what I told her sort of scared her and it sort of scared me too. And when I told them to Barry he said, 'Jeez, I really like that,' and that was the start of a brand new direction.

What came to you exactly?
It was like the first third of the picture, maybe, minus some scenes we had in the final script. A couple are living in a house and a video tape is delivered. When they look at it, it's of the front of their house. They don't think anything of it and then they get another one, and this one is going through the living room, and watching them asleep in bed. This thing I had went all the way up to the fist hitting Fred in the police station – to suddenly being in another place and not knowing how you got there or what is wrong.

Did these ideas come to you in the way you've mentioned before: just sitting down somewhere quietly and allowing your mind to drift off and trawl for ideas and images?
Yeah. The world is getting noisier and more and more frantic in the atmosphere, and so even sitting still is a problem. My friend Bushnell Keeler always said, 'You need to have four hours of uninterrupted time to do one hour of good painting.' If you're rushed, you just can't think and do it. You've gotta really fall in deep to go to this place where you catch ideas. But it really takes sitting still.

Do you do this in a systematic or ritualized way? Is it like a form of meditation?
No. Meditation is a completely different thing. This is more like contemplation. You start thinking, and one thing leads to another and you forget where you started. You forget that you're even thinking for a while. You're lost, and if you suddenly drop through a trapdoor into the big idea bank, then you've got a thing happening.

And then the opening of the film – 'Dick Laurant is dead' . . . I woke up

one morning and the intercom rang, and a man says, 'Dave!' and I said, 'Yeah,' and he says, 'Dick Laurant is dead.' And I said, 'What?' And there was no one there. I can't see the front of the house unless I go all the way to the other end and look out of the big window. And there was no one there. I don't know who Dick Laurant is. All I do know is he's dead!

No one's going to believe that story!
That's a true story! That's a true story! I swear to you.

The scripts for Eraserhead, Blue Velvet *and* Wild at Heart *were your own. Do you enjoy writing with other people?*
I wrote with Chris de Vore and Eric Bergren on *The Elephant Man*, with Mark Frost on *Twin Peaks*, Bob Engels on *Fire Walk with Me*, and now Barry on this, and it's good, because you can check up on each other. If it doesn't inhibit free thinking it's very good because with two people it moves faster and more on course – if it's the right chemistry. If I was working with Mark Frost on *Lost Highway* it would be a different end result. The other people each bring something unique. Barry brings something which is just Barry. And the combo produces something. It's just the nature of the two of us.

It seems you have at least one thing in common with Barry Gifford: neither of you likes to talk too much about the 'meaning' of your work, avoiding personal interpretation. Is that right?
Yeah. On *Lost Highway* we never talked about meanings or anything. We seemed to be in sync on where we were going, so a lot was left unsaid. We talked, but that can be dangerous. If things get too specific, the dream stops. There are things that happen sometimes that open up a door and let you soar out and feel a bigger thing.

The script and the movie feel very much like the tip of an iceberg. Both are full of clues and possibilities, but certain events are only referred to obliquely. Did the two of you talk about the script in terms of what would – and what wouldn't – be made explicit?
No. I don't know about Barry, but for me every single thing comes with a feeling. And an idea comes complete and you just have to stay true to those ideas all the way through the process of making the film. In the script there are a lot of things that aren't said because Barry and I both knew that I was going to be directing it, although I think the script works great. But it's not the final thing. If it was, you'd just release a script and you'd be done!

What was it about Gifford's work that attracted you?
I like a certain sensibility that Barry has about things. He understands a world that I like – and he likes as well. And I really like the characters he writes about. I like what they say; they've got a kind of a coolness and a kind of hipness to them. There's an honesty there, too. And Barry is also a pretty sparse writer, so there's lots of room for me to go off: his work suggests so much. A lot of the things I had in *Wild at Heart* I'm sure Barry didn't have in mind, but the ideas were there for me as seeds.

Gifford has said that maybe the balance between the two of you is that you make the ordinary seem extraordinary and that he makes the extraordinary seem ordinary. Do you agree?
Yeah, his friend Vinnie Deserio came up with that comparison. Those things sound good, you know, but I have no idea.

Gifford wasn't involved at all in the screenplay for Wild at Heart, *and later you were involved solely in terms of director and executive producer on two short teleplays he wrote for your HBO series,* Hotel Room. *You've never written as a team before. In creating and writing* Lost Highway *together, was there more discussion about how the script would be translated to the screen?*
No. Barry understands that a script is a kind of blueprint; that when you begin to cast, find locations and shoot, the film has got a way of becoming different from what he was probably thinking.

Can you say something about the different styles in the film? The first third is very spare, slow and full of dread, but then it changes radically in look, feel and pace after we leave Fred and Renée's house and get into Pete Dayton's life.
Well, there's not really a change of style, there's changes of people and location. There are different sections and, again, each one has to be a certain way. So I guess, if there's a change of style, or appears to be, it's dictated by each section.

A film is like a pyramid. In the beginning you can go slowly and, as you go along, you can never have that same amount of slowness. Things pick up speed as you go along and it may *seem* the same amount of slowness, but in actuality it's much faster, just because you've been going for some time. The feelings, if you're listening to them, take you in the form of a pyramid. You don't see it when you're editing because you're editing in pieces, and you think it can go this slow. Then, when you see it all

together, you *die*. And you start hacking. Most of your hacking is in the last third. Film is *flying*!

The first section of the film – at home with Fred and Renée – is like being in a pressure cooker, or in someone else's bad dream. Was that the intention?
Yeah. That's the feel of the whole thing. It's about a couple who feel that somewhere, just on the border of consciousness – or on the other side of that border – are bad, bad problems. But they can't bring them into the real world and deal with them. So this bad feeling is just hovering there, and the problems abstract themselves and become other things. It just becomes like a bad dream. There are unfortunate things that happen to people, and this story is about that. It depicts an unfortunate occurrence, and gives you the feeling of a man in trouble. A thinking man in trouble.

This section repeatedly uses fade-ins and fade-outs – from and to black. Why did you use that device for a particularly tense part of the story?
Well, I've always loved fade-outs and fade-ins, but again I don't know why. I'd just be telling you baloney. But things go in steps. They need to rise up, take place, and go away, and there needs to be some little moment, a little wind, and then another thing comes up. Just like little thoughts. And they can get you into trouble, you know, those thoughts. [Laughs.]

Fred and Renée's house has an uncertain geography. It seems that it might be endless: that once you step into it, you're entering some potentially vast, dark labyrinth. Dorothy Vallens's apartment in Blue Velvet *is a little like that.*
Right. And that's the way it is in relationships sometimes. You just don't know how they're going to go, if there's an end to them or if there's just more trouble. But all those things are not intellectualized. You have so many choices so, when you're setting up something, you just keep on working till it feels correct. As soon as it matches up in feeling, and all the moves and the look and the sound reinforce all that, you're on the right track.

The production design of the interior of the house is very sparse and purposeful. Everything seems to stand out, as a result – like the line of Mother-in-Law's Tongue plants, which assume the look of a wall of green flame.
Well, production design is mood. I like those plants: they're not so busy, and they have a look that goes with other things. I really don't like plants

Bad problems in a pressure-cooker called home. Fred (Bill Pullman) and Renée Madison (Patricia Arquette) in *Lost Highway* (1997).

inside a house. Flowers are OK, but I don't even really like them. Outside, fine. But inside, it's not happening, for me. I like *moss*. I like moss a lot, you know. It's very slow, but it's so beautifully organic. It looks like green meat and it's pretty beautiful.

As in so much of your work, Lost Highway *focuses on the home: on a domestic situation in a small neighbourhood. And in that home, sound is very important. Can you say something about your use of sound in the film?*
The home is a place where things can go wrong, and the sound comes out of that idea. If you have a room, and it's really quiet, or if there's no sound, you're just looking at this room. If you want a certain kind of mood, you find the sound that creeps into that silence: that starts giving you a feeling. And there are also sounds that kill a mood. So it's getting rid of everything that you don't want, and then building up all the things that are gonna support it and make it whole. Because of a sequence of somebody moving through time, because of this idea here, and that sound there, a word here, and then a look there when the music hits, people start crying. Or they start laughing hysterically, or they become very afraid. How does it work? It's *unbelievable*, the power of cinema.

But every ingredient has got to be right. Like in a symphony. You're just

building and building. You're getting somewhere, but the pay-off is only going to happen because of what's gone before. You can't just have those chords come out of nothing. All the stuff that goes before it is leading to those things hitting in a certain way, and then there's not a dry eye in the house – people are going *crazy* with emotion.

Fred and Renée's house is full of deep rumbles, like an imminent Los Angeles earthquake – trouble from the very core of the planet.
Right. There's one channel of the six-tracks that's going to the subwoofer. There's so much power there, and it gets all that low stuff. There's an uneasiness there. You've just gotta keep pushing the pressure, but you can't abuse it.

That part of the movie also feels similar to Eraserhead, *in the slow, determined way in which both Patricia Arquette and Bill Pullman move. Did you do a lot of rehearsal with them, as you did with Jack Nance for* Eraserhead?
Yeah. Most directors like things to move a hair faster than I like. But that's not a conscious choice on my part. It's just that if it goes too fast, something is missing. In order to slow it down you have to start talking about *why* it has to be this or that way, where it goes and how it feels: interior thinking. If you start in the interior, your moves will slow down. Once an actor tunes into that they will automatically do it correctly.

There's not much dialogue to help them, is there?
No, but every word has gotta be said a certain way. And every move has to be a certain way. It's not that I tell them how to say lines – I never do that. I just start talking and, pretty soon, you don't have to talk so much.

It's one of your toughest movies, in terms of understanding the developing story: what is really happening and what is imagined? Did you want to confound an audience's expectations?
No. No. It needs to be a certain way, and it's not to confound, it's to feel the mystery. Mystery is good, confusion is bad, and there's a big difference between the two. I don't like talking about things too much because, unless you're a poet, when you talk about it, a big thing becomes smaller. But the clues are all there for a correct interpretation, and I keep saying that, in a lot of ways, it's a straight-ahead story. There are only a few things that are a hair off.

Some things in life are not that understandable, but when things in films are that way, people become worried. And yet they are, in *some* way,

understandable. Most films are specifically designed to be understood by many, many, many, many people. So there's not a lot of room to dream and wonder. When CIBY read the script, they had some questions. But then they said that, seeing those things in the film, they're more understandable than when read.

If the story is, at least on one level, about a man who may – or may not – have murdered his wife for her infidelity, both the script and the film refuse to offer any clear evidence of her 'guilt'.
Right, but that's the way it is most of the time: before the hard evidence there are always suspicions. Unless you're a total paranoid, and even then, it's as real as if it had happened, in the poor person's mind. So you don't need hard evidence really. And Fred is quite sensitive. [Laughs.]

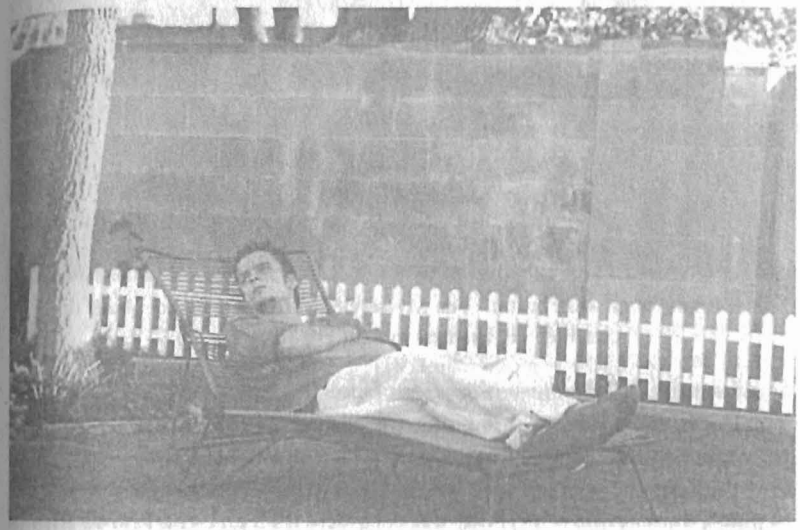
The script isn't ever straightforward about the death of Renée, but the film treats the event even more obliquely by allowing us only the merest glimpse of what is probably Renée's dismembered corpse. Why is that?
It's less clear to Fred. But it was never clear to Fred. It's just clear enough to force him into other areas.

Your work often introduces just a hint of a threatening or 'foreign' element into a familiar situation. Can you say something about that?
Well, it happens often. You're in some place and you're having a good time and someone says something that suddenly introduces a horror. Or you see a bit of a pistol in their pocket, and it changes everything. You think things are one way, and then something happens and you see that they're another way, and you have to deal with it. Those things I really like.

Fred Madison is obviously an obsessive character, consumed by feelings of jealousy and fear of infidelity. Have you ever experienced those emotions?
We can all relate to almost any kind of human behaviour, no matter how bizarre. How that can happen I don't know, but it's in this human behaviour box. We all sort of know it.

The second section of the movie is announced by a beautiful shot of Balthazar Getty as Pete Dayton, lying on a sunbed in the garden. Everything – the music, the colour, the picket fence, the dog and the grace of the camera movement – makes it very reminiscent of Blue Velvet. *A classic 'Lynch' shot, if you like.*

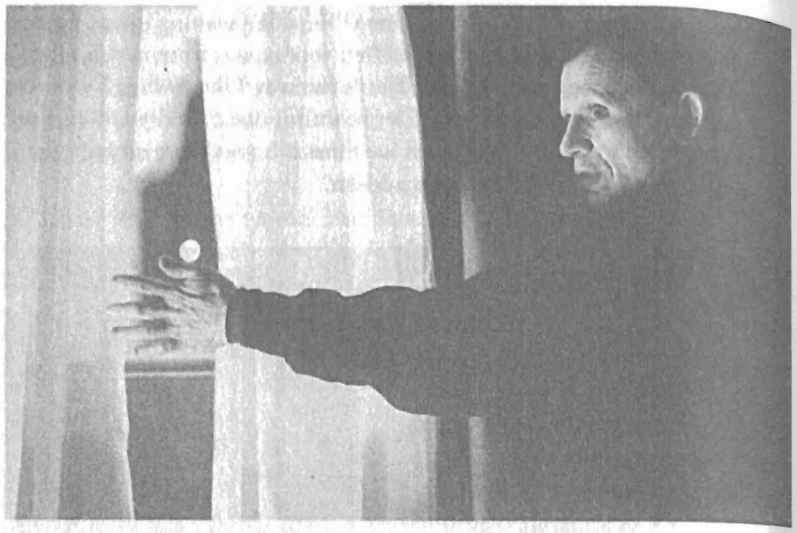
It's like starting a new life. It's Pete's new life – like waking up and seeing children and wondering about things. That shot comes from my childhood in Spokane, Washington. [Laughs.] That's the way I lived when I was two or three: on a little chaise longue. The beautiful days! And we didn't put the picket fence in there either when we filmed. It was there already, but I know people will think that was an add-on.



Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) lounging in the midst of a parallel identity crisis in *Lost Highway* (1997).

One intriguing character who crosses the boundary between the lives of Fred and Pete is The Mystery Man. He reminded me of The Man From Another Place in Twin Peaks *– a representative from somewhere else. Another world, maybe.*
Yeah, he is. I don't wanna say what he is to me, but he's a hair of an abstraction.

I assumed he was one of your elements, and not Gifford's.
Well, the thing is, it's wrong to say that, because when you write with somebody, they become *our* elements. It doesn't matter who came up with what, initially. It becomes our stuff. Barry influences me, I influence Barry. Actually, all the ideas were mine! Originally! [Laughs.]



'A hair of an abstraction.' The Mystery Man (Robert Blake) about to conclude his business in *Lost Highway* (1997).

So where did The Mystery Man come from?
You know, it's a strange thing. I had an idea and I told this to Barry when we were writing. This guy's at a party. He's a wet-behind-the-ears, innocent type. At the party there's another guy who's younger than he is, out of place, doesn't know anybody there, came with a girl who knows a lot of the people. The girl is actually drawing the innocent into a strange thing, but he doesn't know it. The innocent starts talking to this young guy who says strange things to him, similar to what The Mystery Man says to Fred Madison. And Barry just lit up at this. And so that started The Mystery Man in *Lost Highway*.

Another mystery that runs through the script concerns 'that night'. Characters refer to a significant and recent event in Pete Dayton's life that is never defined. This seems to have been played down in the finished film. Why is that?
When you read something in a script, that's one thing. You can read it softly and hide it, or skip it or worry about it later, but when it's said on the big screen it is very real and it can feel wrong. Maybe if you make a thousand pictures and you really understand human nature and audience reaction and film, you know . . . But, at each stage you have chances to check those things and, lo and behold: that's too much. Now, in the film,

it's felt, but it's not really referred to as much as in the script.

On the front page of the script I saw just prior to shooting, you had described Lost Highway *as a 'twenty-first-century* noir *horror film'.*
Yeah. That's just sort of baloney. It's a dangerous thing to say what a picture is. I don't like pictures that are one genre only, so this is a combination of things. It's a kind of horror film, a kind of a thriller, but basically it's a mystery. That's what it is. A mystery.

To me, a mystery is like a magnet. Whenever there is something that's unknown, it has a pull to it. If you were in a room and there was an open doorway, and stairs going down and the light just fell away, you'd be very tempted to go down there. When you only see a part, it's even stronger than seeing the whole. The whole might have a logic, but out of its context, the fragment takes on a tremendous value of abstraction. It can become an obsession.

But it's a big problem. In studios, more often than not these days, it's not one person making the decisions: it's a committee. And if there's money at risk, their jobs are at stake and they become afraid. So they need to understand what it is they're going to make. So it decreases the chance for any abstractions. Abstractions are not something you wanna throw money at!

Playing both Renée and Alice, Patricia Arquette told me she became very confused at one point. She thought she might be playing two different women, but was then told by you that they were the same woman. And on top of that, the script also suggests that one of them dies!
[Laughs.] Well, as an actor, there's something about giving yourself up and being somebody else. You have to have a certain kind of mind, and that certain kind of mind can enjoy and relish in abstractions and strangeness. All it takes is a little bit of trust and a little bit of a clue and it suddenly becomes a mystery. To an actor it's a beautiful thing. And then each actor builds a story inside to support what they're going to do. It would be interesting to see what stories they were building. But they have to build some interior thing to make a word or a look come out truthfully. And so you help each other get to that place. But I never said much about the meanings of things. We mostly talked about little fragments of thoughts that could make it correct.

Arquette's own rationale for Lost Highway *goes something like this: a man murders his wife because he thinks she's being unfaithful. He can't*

deal with the consequences of his actions and has a kind of breakdown. In this breakdown he tries to imagine a better life for himself, but he's so fucked up that even this imaginary life goes wrong. The mistrust and madness in him are so deep that even his fantasies end in a nightmare.
But why though? Because of this person. The woman. No matter which place you first start walking, eventually you're going to walk into trouble – if you're walking with the wrong person.

Meaning Arquette's character?
Yeah.

Obviously, the story Arquette built for herself worked for her: this man imagines himself as a younger, virile guy, meeting a woman who wants him all the time instead of shutting him out, but this fantasy also falls apart.
That's exactly right.

She also told me that she did a lot of research for this part, like going to some very bizarre clubs.
Yeah, she went to some strange clubs! Since with Renée and/or Alice, their lives touch on the world of pornography, she wanted to get a sense of what that was like, so she did some research in that area. Patricia had to do things in this picture that seemed difficult and that took a tremendous amount of courage. She's the best young actress going. The thing I loved about working with her is that she's very young at heart, with a tremendous hipness and energy and openness to anything. But she's so grounded and adult at the same time. I think it's partly due to having a child. Life has given her such a solid base of experience, and it's made her such a *whole* person. She's so *smart*, and there's an understanding there beyond her years. And when you watch her performance there's *magical* things happening – subtle little things. Always so truthful. It didn't dawn on me *just* how great her performance was until I'd seen it about fifty times.

Do you ever think of actors when you're writing? Or is that the wrong way round?
Mostly it is the wrong way around, but I think I always wanted Bill Pullman for Fred Madison. He's a kind of regular guy, and he's smart. I think Barry and I talked about Bill when we were writing. It can be very helpful to picture somebody. You get an image of someone anyway, but with a picture of an actor it's very specific and you can see them talking

Walking with the wrong person. Alice (Patricia Arquette) presides over the death-by-coffee table of Andy (Michael Manssee) in *Lost Highway* (1997).

and it's, 'Oh, they wouldn't be able to say that.' Or they would, but it wouldn't be right.

Do you bother to do readings with them?
No. I hate them, I don't think I've ever had an actor read. I just talk to them and then I get a feel and I can tell. Reading is weird, because then I want to start rehearsing! And it's unfair to them: an embarrassment in a weird way. Every reading is only a point of departure. From there it goes somewhere else, so how can a cold reading be any good?

Have you ever had a particularly bad reaction to a script from an actor?
Once. For Frank Booth, I sent the script to an actor. I can't remember his name, but he became *violent* in his response. And I think even after the film came out he said very bad things about it. People misunderstand. If you have violence in your film they think that you're condoning it or spreading it, and it's just not that way. You can't have a movie where everyone's telling nice little stories and knitting. But a great thing about actors is the questions they ask. The problems they have with a character can help you immensely.

Mr Eddy seems to be in a fine Lynch tradition of very nasty villains. The

tailgating scene in the film is reminiscent of certain sequences in Wild at Heart, *in which an inappropriate and extreme violence breaks loose.*
Yeah. And Robert Loggia was great. He's just *great*. Usually actors are worried about going 'over the top', right? Robert tells this story about how I kept going up to him during that scene, saying, 'Robert, I can't hear you, you're whispering, you're whispering.' So he'd say, 'I'm *not* whispering!' And I'd say, 'Robert, you're whispering.' And so he was going crazy inside himself. He's saying, 'What does this guy want from me?' And then he hit this one particular take. He fell into this realm of over-the-topness, and got the rage. But he's always had it inside. He was incredible. Always, when I saw Robert Loggia, I saw anger and a power.

Robert wanted to play the Frank Booth part in *Blue Velvet*. I can't remember the particulars, but we were testing this actress from Australia as a possible Dorothy, and I got this young actor and said, 'I want you to be Jeffrey, because we're testing, but you're not playing the part in the movie,' and he says, 'I know that. No problem, happy to do it. We'll do something later.' Robert Loggia had agreed to come in to play Frank, knowing that it *could* be him, but it probably wouldn't be. I wanted my casting agent, Johanna, to make sure people understood. Unfortunately, I started out testing the Jeffrey character and I got really involved with rehearsing and stuff. I ran outa time and they were throwing us out, so I had to go out to tell Robert that it wasn't going to happen. And he got so upset it wasn't *funny*. And he remembered that.

So, when they were both shooting on *Independence Day*, Bill Pullman started talking to Robert Loggia and gave him the script of *Lost Highway* because Bill had an idea that Robert would be perfect for Mr Eddy. Robert loved the thing but he said there was no way he'd be able to do it, because I would've remembered how upset he got at me. But it was his getting upset like that that made him perfect for this role!

There are many scenes in the script that didn't make it to the final film. What informed the decisions to drop them?
It's action and reaction all the way along, so the film's never finished till it's finished. It's always a work-in-progress until the very end. So it's dangerous to fall in love with scenes. But it's so important not to drop something completely early on. You might really need some part of it. You'd be surprised at the things that stay in and the things that go out.

We had this execution scene in the prison. Fred Madison is in his cell and he's reacting to Sammy G. walking to be executed, and the priest and

several lawyers and little entourages are going down the hall right outside his cell door. There were also some reaction shots of him just imagining the execution while it was going on. And even though the execution was dropped, those shots of Fred reacting were perfect for his transition into Pete Dayton. So you never know how things are going to end up. One shot of a scene that's 99 per cent cut out stays in the film and says it all.

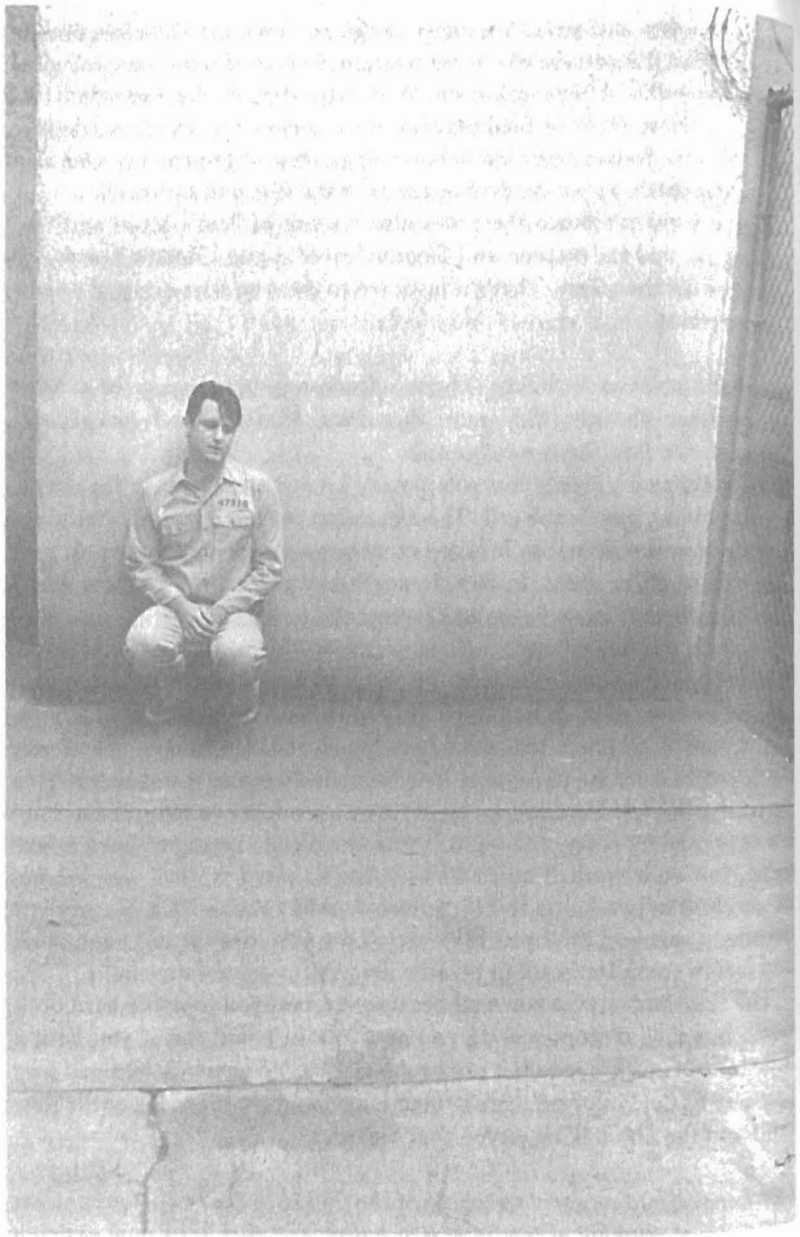
In the warden's office there was also a scene of Pete's Mom and Dad coming in, and the warden and Doctor Smordin and Captain Luneau all talking – for five pages. That's now down to three or four cuts and no one says anything.

But that discussion with Pete Dayton's family would have confirmed what an audience thought *they saw: that Fred Madison had inexplicably changed into Pete Dayton in his cell.*
Well, it did and it didn't! But you already know that. That's in the movie. It's the wrong guy in the cell. The discussion in that scene was trying to explain the unexplainable. It raised more questions than it answered. So it didn't have to be there. In fact, it was harmful for it to be there and I didn't know that when Barry and I wrote the script.

Did you have to remove scenes in order to keep the movie down to a certain running time, as with Fire Walk with Me?
No. I had a contract that said two hours and fifteen minutes. I was panicked because we had a very long first cut. Not that it was working so perfectly, but what are you going to lose to get down to two-fifteen? And I was just going *crazy*. I thought it was completely wrong to have a time thing, but as it worked out, and as it has so often worked out, we got down close to two hours and then started adding things back in – not just because it was free, but because we were now able to really react and think and feel in complete freedom because we were under the time limit.

The time limit serves you well because it forces you to make hard decisions, but then it stops serving you at a certain point. But if you have a little bit too much freedom it can be dangerous. You get lazy and you stop listening to the film. And there's something about the marriage of the time limit and the film talking to you that's good.

I gather you had an early screening of the film with Barry Gifford present when it was running at just over two hours, and that your own reaction was very bad.
My reaction was that I wished I had not shown this to anyone. But those



Life about to take a radical turn for the same. Death Row dweller Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) in *Lost Highway* (1997).

screenings are very important. Otherwise, you fall in love with the film and you think it's OK. Having other people around forces you to see it isn't OK, and it forces you to do something about it. So Mary and I go back to work and fix things as best as possible. It's really dangerous, because when you take something out, you remember what you took out, but the audience never knows that it was there. But when an audience sees the film, you can feel whether or not the information is there. Mary had a screening and she asked the audience lots of questions afterwards. That way you can check up on how you're doing. I always say, if enough people have a problem with a certain thing, chances are there is a problem. I think Barry agreed with me when I told him about the things I wanted to get rid of. It's pretty obvious: they become like a bunch of sore thumbs. So you just whack 'em out.

Did you have final cut on this movie?
I've always had final cut since *Dune*. One time this producer told me, 'We love to give directors final cut because they are more likely to listen to our suggestions. They know they don't have to take it, but they are open to listening.' I think it's really important to be open to anybody's suggestions. Some could be so beneficial. And you can always say 'No'. I don't think you should set yourself up and say, 'I'm gonna do my thing and I'm not listening to you.'

So many feature films these days are edited on non-linear computer systems like Avid or Lightworks, but you chose to edit Lost Highway *the traditional way – on film with a Kem. Why?*
I personally hate Avid. I hate the image, I hate the TV screen, and I hate being at such a remove. You don't ever *feel* the film. It's a phoney, cheap, bad image. And I haven't got a *clue* how it works. For cutting a commercial with sixteen different layers of things, it's pretty nice. But for a feature film where it's 99 per cent straight cuts, there's nothing like a Kem and the quality image.

I know that you think first impressions of what you're shooting are very important in terms of remembering and listening to them throughout the editing process. Those first impressions are also close to those of an audience that is only going to see the movie once. How do you approach viewing dailies?
Well, for me, what's in front of your eye is one thing, and what the camera, and the film, and the lab's processing, and the projection show

you is another. After a week of dailies, your mind is able to translate what you're seeing in front of you on the shoot to what that will look like on film. It's really important to see what the film does to what you're seeing. If the camera is still rolling and it just pans away to be turned off, you could see something in there that you like. So, you see, accidents happen and they might also inspire you. Herb Cardwell was right, in a way, when he said, 'When you see dailies there should be no surprises,' but he was also wrong. There are certain things the film does that are surprising.

On *Lost Highway* we did a lot of tests up front using different filters and different camera speeds for shooting certain things, and all those things pay off. So you do your homework up front and get the feel of what all these things are doing. It also gives you ideas.

When Fred Madison 'transforms' into Pete Dayton in the script, the description is quite complex, and yet in the film it's very simply in the camera rather than through complex digital effects. Is that something you prefer to do, so that you can see it happening as you're filming it?

Definitely. Morphing and Computer Generated Imaging and all this stuff is like the Avid to me now. Everybody and his little brother is doing it. It's super-expensive, it's completely time-consuming and it's the kind of thing that I'm not sure how much you can really see before you're locked into accepting the final product. And once you block out a digital effect, you're closing a door. I wanted to find a different way. Actually, there are a lot of elements in that transformation, but they're all organic: in the camera.

I did this thing for Michael Jackson, a computer-generated thirty-second teaser trailer for the album *Dangerous*. It had its own look, which was OK, but it didn't look like film. So when a CGI sequence comes back and is cut into your feature film, how is it going to look? Is it going to look like plastic next to beautiful wood? I don't know. You've got to worry about every little frame you're making, and if you don't have the money, find another way to get that exact same thing so you don't have to compromise. You can find a way.

I don't really think the technology is quite there yet. With *Terminator II* they used it in a most beautiful way and it worked in the film, but a lot of people are just doing it because it's new. The film has to support those things and have that kind of room for them.

CIBY-2000's pre-publicity for the movie encapsulates the entire synopsis in three words: 'a psychogenic fugue'. Were you ever aware that such a mental condition, a form of amnesia which is a flight from reality, actually existed?

No. Barry and I didn't know what that was. Debra Wuliger, the unit publicist on the picture, happened to find it in some medical journal or something. She showed it to us, and it was like *Lost Highway*. Not literally, but an interior thing can happen that's very similar. A certain mental disturbance. But it sounds like such a beautiful thing – 'psychogenic fugue'. It has music and it has a certain *force* and dreamlike quality. I think it's beautiful, even if it didn't mean anything.

More revealing than 'psychogenic' – which basically means 'having origin in the mind' – is the definition of 'fugue'. Although it's primarily a musical term, it completely describes the picture: one theme starts and is then taken up by a second theme in answer. But the first continues to supply an accompaniment or counter-theme. Doesn't this perfectly describe the complex relationship between Fred and Pete?

Exactly. That's why I think they called it a 'psychogenic *fugue*' because it goes from one thing, segues to another, and then I think it comes back again. And so it *is Lost Highway*. And whether these people who have this illness come back again or not, or how long the fugue lasts, I don't know. But it gets pretty crazy with two themes churning, finding a way to separate and then coming back again.

Didn't you read up on it when working on the script?

No, no, no, no. Certain things happen, ideas come along and they string themselves together and they form a whole and then a theme, or something becomes apparent – if you wanna look for it. But if you're true to these ideas you don't need to know. If you start off with a theme and say, 'We're gonna amplify this theme,' and do a story about teenage rape, that to me is completely backwards. Then you've gotta force things to fit. The other way, you don't know what it is. It just comes together and then later you find out. But meanwhile you're falling in love with it. You just know somewhere that it's right for you.

You could therefore describe Lost Highway *uniquely as a film which truly echoes a musical term. A real musical! Did you and Angelo Badalamenti discuss the score in terms of a fugue?*

We never really got into that. Fugues make me feel insane. I can only listen to a certain amount of a fugue, and then I feel like I'm gonna blow up from the inside out.

So how did you and Angelo decide on a way forward with Lost Highway*?*
Mary Sweeney played a big part in that, because she just loves orchestra, as opposed to synth. For a long time people have been trying to do strings with synth. It's a cool sound, but it isn't strings. Angelo himself has been going more and more towards the synth, but an orchestra can play incredible abstractions and push music towards sound. And one of my favourite guys is Pendereki who writes some really avant-garde things. The guy's a heavyweight. So I really wanted to get Angelo to push the orchestra into some modern areas and still get a mood.

There's nothing like a real orchestra. And there's nothing like an orchestra in Prague! There's something about the Eastern European thing that blows through the music. Stephan Konicek was our conductor and Jiri Zobach was the engineer and they're just great guys. They're living a life now, you know what I mean? They're really happy. When we were there in '85 for *Blue Velvet* there was nothing in the shops. It was really bleak, and that bleakness kinda crept into the music.

Anyway, we thought it would be great to go back to Prague and do some modern orchestration – abstractions and stuff like that. Certain parts of the film are dark and *noir*-like, and when I started talking to Angelo about what feel it needed, this certain set of instruments just jumped into our minds. Angelo just started writing and we came up with a modern use of an orchestra. It took a long time – just Angelo playing certain sounds and different kinds of things – but we locked into something finally. And then, once you catch it, it just flows. Angelo felt very pressured on this movie because it was all very last-minute – the last three weeks before we were going to Prague he was scrambling. His score for *Blue Velvet* was more traditional but, since then, he writes many long pieces not necessarily designed for any one place in the film which I call firewood, and then I 'saw' it and find places for them. With digital technology you can go so fast, try things and layer them, and that makes me and Angelo very happy!

Looking at some footage Toby Keeler shot of you recording the music in Prague, you seem to be experimenting with tubes and various home-made devices, and recording through those. What exactly is going on?
Well, for one of the early screenings I wanted to do a temp-mix of certain things. So we set up three Kems, which have two audio tracks each, so we had six soundtracks going. We also had a boom-box with music on it. I wanted to minimize the sound of the Kems running and get these sounds out of the speakers, so I went to my workshop and got this four-inch

vacuum tube that sucks up sawdust. I locked a microphone at the end of the tube and then I just pushed the other end of the tube up against the speakers. I started at the boom-box, got it, and then I'd move over to one Kem and get a sound going there. I could move closer and increase the volume and move in to the other Kem, then swing back and at the very end I came over to my Kem, which had the music on it. They were all cued: they had to start and stop and blend.

It ended up a really interesting temp-mix because the form of the tube altered the sound. So then I had that tube thing in my head when we went to Prague. There was a construction site right across the street, so we got these tubes. I also wanted to get a five-gallon water bottle but, of course, in Prague they don't have the same kind of water bottles, you know. But Jiri brought in a very large wine bottle and we dropped microphones into the wine bottle and put more microphones at the ends of the tubes, which were a different size. The idea is that the sound comes into the end of the tube and is altered and picked up. It's just an effect, but a lot of organic effects are very interesting because, even with sophisticated distortion devices, you can't get that particular sound. So we mixed in some of the tube sounds to the music at different times. The wine bottle sound was very ethereal and we got some nice distortions. The music that was done is really pretty spectacular and not all of it is in the film. It has a modern *noir* kind of feel to it. And we had some very strange combos of instruments playing strange ways.

What about the 'pop' music featured in Lost Highway*? I'm thinking particularly of the opening David Bowie song, 'I'm Deranged'. It could almost have been written for the movie.*
It was! [Laughs.] It was track number sixteen on Bowie's last album. So I'm listening to the album and I'm really liking it. And then I hit track sixteen and the whole beginning of the film jumped right out at me. Exactly as you see it. It works in mood and with the story in many ways.

Also, this German band, Rammstein, kept sending me stuff and I didn't listen to it. And then – fate again – having just finished the script, I sat down and listened to it and, *bang*! I couldn't wait to have this in the picture. Rammstein sent us fifty cassettes, because the crew started freaking out, loving this music. And with these fifty CDs floating around, there wasn't one day on the shoot that Rammstein wasn't *blasting*, from some truck. It became really, *really* big with the crew.

And then I met Trent Ressner from Nine Inch Nails and started working on some things with him. Trent did two songs and some drone work for

the picture – he's got a *great* mind for music and sound.

He obviously shares your understanding of music as another sound effect.
Exactly right, and a lot of things are going that way. The borderline between sound effects and music is the most *beautiful* area.

Then Barry Gifford turned me on to this *Doc Pomus's Greatest Hits* – Doc Pomus covers sung by a range of groups and artists. And when I heard Lou Reed singing 'This Magic Moment' I just loved it and really wanted to use it. And ten years after *Blue Velvet* I was able to afford 'Song for the Siren' by This Mortal Coil. That's one of my all-time favourite songs.

Does the fear and trepidation you associate with releasing a new movie ever get better, the more you continue to make them?
No, it doesn't. In fact it can get worse. People have expectations, and you have further to fall. Audiences know your work, or some anyway. So it's trickier. You're not a new person on the scene. That only happens once. I would love right now to have my next film ready and go right to work, and not deal with whatever happens. Good or bad. Because it has nothing really to do with me any more. The film is the thing. I don't need to talk about it. I don't need to do anything. That is phoney stuff. The fine art of Phoney Baloney.

Given that you haven't made a film since Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me *– a critical flop – do you think there is even more expectation or anticipation about* Lost Highway*?*
I don't know what's going on out there. But *Fire Walk with Me* was a beautiful experience, in a way. When you're *down*, when you've been kicked down in the street, and then kicked a few more times till you're really bleeding and some teeth are out, then you really only have up to go. It's so *beautiful* to be down there.

And you'd had that experience once before with Dune.
Yeah, I was way down after *Dune*. I was almost dead! It was only *The Elephant Man* that kept me bobbing. Because of that the critics couldn't discount me completely. If I'd just made *Eraserhead* and *Dune* I'd have been cooked.

You've said that you feel closest to Henry in Eraserhead, *a frightened man. Fred Madison isn't so different, is he?*

A terrifying ride down the lost highway for Fred Madison (Bill Pullman).

No, he's not. He's lost in confusion and darkness, where fear is in the driver's seat!

Does making cinema in any way function as a form of therapy for you? Does it help in changing your personal or inner life for the better?
No, I don't think it happens that way for me. But if you got all your toys back that you loved when you were a kid, they just wouldn't do the same thing to you. So you do change a little as you go along, but I don't think we have enough time in one life to change that much.

I assume that for many people the main comfort of religion is that death is not the end. Is that something you would agree with?
Well, I don't know if I want to get into all this but . . . I believe it is *not* the end when we die. But that's my word against somebody else's! It's just the way I believe. It's like going to sleep: you wake up in the morning and you start a new day. That could be a symbol for a bigger picture: you die and you have a little time in a dream and, *by golly*, you come back!

But we might be occupying the dream part right now. Who's to say that this isn't limbo, and that real life is behind or ahead of us?
A lot of this is mistaking the rope for the snake. We're not experiencing

the ultimate reality: the 'real' is hiding all through life, but we don't see it. We mistake it for all these other things. Fear is based on not seeing the whole thing and, if you could get there and see the whole thing, fear is out the window.

10

It's a Great Big Wonderful World Revisited

The Straight Story

There was some shocking news from the Cannes Film Festival in May 1999: David Lynch's new film did not disturb, offend or mystify. Dwarves, Mystery Men, strange hair-dos, doughnuts, drugs and dead homecoming queens were conspicuous by their absence. Lynch's ability to surprise both critics and audiences was obviously still intact, but this time he had wrong-footed them with the absolute simplicity and – at times – heartbreaking humanity of *The Straight Story*.

Based on real events that had first surfaced in the American press in 1994, the movie centres on seventy-three-year-old Alvin Straight, who lived in Laurens, Iowa. Hearing that his estranged older brother Lyle was seriously ill, he decided to make the 300-mile journey to Mount Zion, Wisconsin, to visit him. However, he was too blind to drive. His unlikely solution to the problem of getting there was to hit the highway astride a John Deere motorized lawnmower, capable of a top speed of 5 miles an hour. Six weeks later the Straight brothers' reunion finally took place.

There is nothing about *The Straight Story* that is difficult to follow, and as word about the movie spread, this fact seemed to give rise to an almost palpable sense of relief among many critics and journalists. By contrast, *Lost Highway* had been a Möbius strip of a movie – a linear narrative made into a loop, but twisted before the ends were joined. As a result, the viewer was flipped from one side to another – or from one state of mind to another – while travelling along its length, often missing the point at which the story actually started and finished. It was at once a two-dimensional and three-dimensional piece of work; an ingenious narrative experiment that wasn't so much *about* Fred Madison's twisted mental state as a manifestation of the breakdown itself.

The cynical reaction to *The Straight Story* was to see it as Lynch's attempt to regain some commercial ground after *Lost Highway*'s failure at the box office. Another misguided reaction was to construe the movie as proof that Lynch had finally grown up as a film-maker. He seemed to have abandoned the troubles, nightmares and fantasies of an arrested adolescent, and turned his considerable directorial skills to a mature work: a simple story about simple folk. So this is where all that darkness and confusion had been leading, was the assumption; Lynch had put aside childish fears, stepped out into the light and surrendered to common, and commercial, sense.

The cynics, wishful thinkers and mainstream American cinema junkies might have thought again if they'd been given the opportunity to see Lynch's new television series *Mulholland Drive* at this time. But just as *The Straight Story* arrived in the sunny south of France, the pilot episode was being rejected outright by ABC. It would be another two years before *Mulholland Drive* would surface again, now transformed into a feature film and receiving its premiere at Cannes. Evoking various forms of inexplicable dread – generated by unsettling characters, weird abstractions and disturbing apparitions – it took the Möbius strip approach of *Lost Highway* to even greater extremes. It was pronounced a world-class head-scratcher, and won Lynch a Best Director award from the festival jury in 2001. So much for growing up.

The Straight Story is not 'wiser', 'happier' or 'more mature' David Lynch. It is, however, *pure* David Lynch. It's just that we don't often experience this version of him. The presence of this other Lynch in *The Straight Story* is, crucially, due to the fact that the film was developed and co-written by Lynch's 'sweetheart' Mary Sweeney, who also produced and edited the film – as she does all of his work. 'To me, there's a real continuum between *The Elephant Man* and *The Straight Story*. That's the other side of David – it's like an Irish, lyrical, poetic side that is emotional without being sentimental, and full of grace.'

For some time Sweeney had been looking to acquire the film rights to existing stories for Lynch to direct – stories that were not so personally rooted in darkness and confusion. 'Artists like David or Woody Allen make one film after another in a very particular style and people get jaded. They fail to appreciate just how gifted these film-makers are. That was certainly something we were hearing after *Lost Highway*. David's not conscious of that sort of thing at all, but I'm his companion and his producer. I see all of David's sides, and I was really happy to see him attracted to something that was completely different and that would dislodge people's expectations. It was a story that I loved, but I was a smart enough girl to know that I was a very lucky writer and producer to have David Lynch directing this picture. I think the idea of his doing something so unexpected tickled him, and challenged him a little bit.'

Lynch had temporarily stopped lifting the rock to peek at the dark, writhing mess beneath, but the rock never looked more gorgeous. From the opening shots of *The Straight Story*, you know you're right in the heart of a rural version of Lynchland. The painterly attention to texture, colour and composition is unmistakable. Following in Alvin's lawnmower tracks, Lynch is able – more than ever before – to take a good look at the American landscape. Not even a European director – besotted with this mythical country – could achieve Lynch's palpable sense of wonderment. The face of Richard Farnsworth, as Alvin Straight, becomes a geological feature of that landscape – craggy, weather-beaten and endlessly fascinating. Although Lynch is uninterested in making genre cinema, this is the stuff of classic Westerns – an end-of-the-millennium

version of John Wayne's eroded, totemic head as just another of Monument Valley's sun-blasted, rocky sculptures. As Sweeney observes, 'David is a very frontier kind of boy in a part of his soul.'

As someone with a Muybridge-like fascination for the minutiae of human locomotion, Lynch must also have been attracted to the painfully slow pace of Alvin's progress from Laurens to Mount Zion. We're reminded of all those somnambulistic, highly detailed moves made by Jack Nance in *Eraserhead*, or the comically slow old folk often glimpsed in the margins of *Twin Peaks*. The story of Alvin the Easy Lawnmower Rider allowed Lynch quietly to oppose the often mindless speed of so much contemporary American cinema. In fact, it helped to stop the world itself from spinning so in an atmosphere of unspeakable dread, and mental and moral disintegration.

As Sweeney herself concludes: 'I think *The Straight Story* served perfectly as a palate cleanser between *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*. It was a gift we gave each other.'

RODLEY: The Straight Story *is literally that, and* Lost Highway *was anything but. Did you want a simpler, more straightforward proposition for your next film?*

LYNCH: No, not a bit. It just happened that that's what I fell in love with next. It could have been something that was *harder* to understand than *Lost Highway*. Maybe there are reasons why I fell in love with *The Straight Story*. But I don't really care about finding out what they are because I think you just have to see what comes along and see what gets you. Between films, when I'm looking for the next project, I always say that you should keep all your doors open. If you close a bunch of them and imagine that you'll never do, say, a G-rated [General] film, then you could really be missing out on something.

True, but I never thought I'd see the day when a movie by you would be given a General rating by the Motion Picture Association of America.

Mary, as the producer, would normally have taken that call from the MPAA. But she had to go out that afternoon and asked me if I wouldn't mind taking it. So a man did call and he said, 'You have a G rating.' So I said, 'You've gotta tell me that one more time!'

Some people still wait for something very bad to happen in the movie. Also, somebody was standing in line for a preview screening and a lady behind them said, 'Isn't it odd that there are two directors named David Lynch.' [Laughs.]

Were you looking for something that might be a break from the darkness and confusion of characters like Fred Madison?
No, no, no. That would be another sick reason for doing a movie! There has to be something about it that gets you. If you say 'I'm tired of doing this kind of film', that's a step, but then you still have to fall in love with something else. So now the machine is slightly changed and is looking for that something else. It's like a guy who is tired of his girl and is looking out for another girl. But it could be surprising what kind of a girl he finds. A strange thing happens when you finally decide what you're going to do. It's like when you meet that girl and there's some sort of thing in the air. It's like an aerial view looking right down on the two of you and how that sits in the world.

I have the same frustrations and turmoil as I've always had, so it would be wrong to interpret *The Straight Story* as a barometer of my state of mind. You could draw some strange conclusions from that!

A lot of the reviews did, however, say things like 'At last David Lynch has grown up' and 'Thank god he's given up all that nasty sex and violence stuff'. Does that kind of response bug you?
People say all kinds of things when a film is done and put out into the world. All that stuff is the hole, and the work is the doughnut. They say

The 'other' David Lynch on location for *The Straight Story* (1999).

'Keep your eye on the doughnut and *not* on the hole.' I'm trying to keep my eye on the doughnut.

Obviously I love *Wild at Heart* and I fell in love with *The Straight Story*. Who can explain it? The world is different compared to when *Wild at Heart* was made. There was something happening then that *Wild at Heart* was right for. But now violence has reached an absurd stage where you just don't feel it any more. And there's no way now you can swear more in movies. It's like there's a wall there – a numb sort of thing.

Many critics also said that The Straight Story *was your most mature work. Why do you think that was?*
I don't know! *The Elephant Man* was most similar to this and that was only my second picture, so I don't think it matters. If you get inside the story and feel it, it doesn't matter what age you are.

When the time came, did Mary just present you with a copy of the finished script for The Straight Story?
Yes. Up to that point I had only been hearing about the surface of the story and I didn't think it was for me. Obviously I would hear about things, but not what was actually going to be in the script. So basically I jumped from the idea of an old man going to visit his brother on a lawnmower straight to the script. So it took me by surprise, and whereas I was saying before 'I don't think I'm going to be directing this', I changed my mind.

Since The Elephant Man *you've always written or co-written your movies. Was this something you thought you couldn't or shouldn't write?*
I don't know that I could have written it. But, as I've said before, an idea isn't yours anyway. It comes from some place, pops into your mind, and you see the whole thing. When you read a script or book it comes alive in your mind. It's that coming alive in your mind, that falling in love and your first impressions that dictate what follows. So it doesn't matter where the ideas come from. At some point you make them your own.

You're always saying that you have to fall in love with a story. What was it about this one that hooked you?
It was the emotion that came out of the script that got me. That was the main thing, and the simplicity of the story. I just fell in love with those two things – not as a challenge exactly, but I saw that there were fewer elements running together in a linear story, so for me it was really an experiment.

Putting matters straight. Richard Farnsworth (as Alvin) and Harry Dean Stanton (as Lyle) on location for *The Straight Story* (1999).

Every film is an experiment, but because there were so few elements going on in *The Straight Story*, those elements became BIG. So then you have to watch them *very* closely.

On The Straight Story *soundtrack album there's a quote by you that says 'Tenderness can be as abstract as insanity'. What does that mean?*
Well, this *is* a straight story – a very traditional story – but I felt that to get the emotions right would entail dealing with abstractions. That was the thing about this film that drew me – the feelings coming out of it and how to get those translated into film.

Considering how moving The Elephant Man *was, it's odd that many critics also seemed surprised by the genuine tenderness of* The Straight Story. *It's almost as if they don't expect you to have such feelings – that you come from another planet.*
Yes, but people have all these different sides. I cried so much during *The Straight Story* – and doing *The Elephant Man*. Some of my reviews made me cry as well! But sometimes I just sit in the editing room and weep. Emotion is a thing that cinema can really communicate, but it's tricky. The

balancing of elements is critical. A little too much of something and you kill the emotion; too little of something else and it just doesn't happen. In *The Straight Story* the challenge was all about trying to find that tender balancing point.

Was the script based on a lot of research?
Yes. Mary and John Roach did Alvin's trip. They talked to the Straight family, they talked to many people along the route, people that covered the story, people that met him, talked to him, and the family who took him in when his lawnmower broke down. They collected as much material as they could before they started writing.

Did it matter to you that you were going to be doing a movie about a real person – someone that a lot of other people knew, people who were still alive to see the completed film?
Yes and no. People have said there are two Alvins – the real Alvin and the movie Alvin. I never knew the real Alvin, and certain details of the story changed a bit, so there was a freedom in it not having to be an exact documentary.

So how close is the movie to the actual events of Alvin's journey, and does it matter?
It's close, but it doesn't matter. [Laughs.]

What about his many encounters with people in the movie? Were they based on actual meetings?
A lot of them were and some were not. Some were based on other true stories that got folded in, like the Deer Lady. Alvin didn't meet her, but she *does* exist – a woman who, for some unknown reason, hit thirteen deer. [Laughs.] Alvin could easily have bumped into some weirdos, but the reality was that most people just liked sitting down and talking to him. The Midwest farming community is a hard place to live and I think that, more than in most places, folk have to rely on each other and help each other.

There's also the idea that although Alvin is growing old, he hasn't really changed within. That very much echoes my own beliefs – that it's just the body that changes and disintegrates. Inside we're the same age as when we were little, and when we die it's just the body that stops functioning. Other things remain. I'm convinced that there are many things out there that we don't know about. In Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* George Bailey

Ageing James Dean Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth) floors the accelerator on his little green John Deere lawnmower in *The Straight Story* (1999).

wanted to leave town but even though he stayed he wasn't diminished in any way. It's exactly the same for Alvin. He hasn't changed at the end of the film from the person he was at the start of it.

The age thing intrigues me, given that so much of what is made these days is geared to young kids.
It's all tied up with money and the fear of death that permeates this culture. Alvin is an old guy, but he's a total rebel. He's like James Dean, except he's old. He's also like a million other old guys. Inside we feel ageless because the self we talk to doesn't have an age.

In the movie Alvin says that the worse thing about getting old is remembering that you were once young. Does growing old depress you?
No. Dying scares me, but that's just because it's a *big* change. But getting older is kind of interesting. I don't know what would be the worse thing about getting old. I'll tell you when I get there!

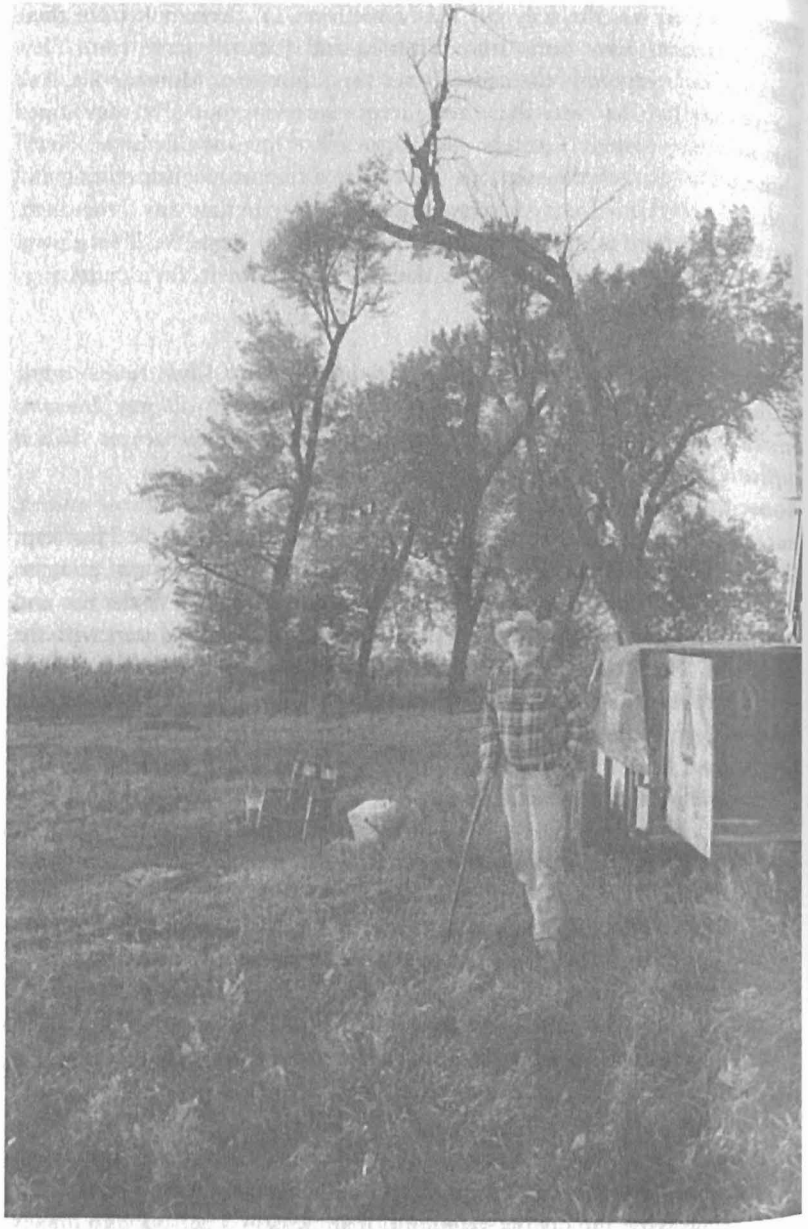
Where did you find all those great old faces and actors for the film?
Mostly from Chicago and Minneapolis. They work mainly in the theatre and maybe do the odd commercial, but they hardly do any film work. Harry

Dean Stanton was the only guy that came from LA. Everett McGill came from Arizona, Sissy came from Virginia and Richard came from New Mexico. But everybody else came from either Chicago or Minneapolis. And the reason for that was that those actors were so good. I've developed this new thing where I just get people to talk to me on videotape. First I chose pictures, then they sent me videotapes of the people just talking and I picked everybody from Minneapolis and Chicago in that way. I met them for the *first time* on the set and when they arrived I was NOT let down. They knew that neck of the woods, they knew the farmers, the accents, they knew everything.

Some scenes are heartbreaking, like the one in which Alvin swaps tragic World War Two stories just sitting at a bar with another old guy. It seems so real – as if those two actors had had those actual experiences. Was it difficult filming those moments?
Those things are very delicate. All the dialogue was based on true stories, but it's common sense that they have to come from the actors. So I just kept things – not abnormally quiet exactly – but everybody knew it was going to be a kind of peaceful situation. I gave them time to just sit at the bar and have some coffee while we were setting things up and then I'd start with the close-ups. There were two cameras, each doing a close-up apiece and there was *no* rehearsal. *Nothing*. So it was completely fresh. Everyone had to kind of *feel* a little bit more than their job, especially in some scenes, or they'd have busted the mood. So you've got to get good people all around you in every job to be able to do that.

Can you tell me about the casting of Richard Farnsworth as Alvin? It's impossible to think of the film without him.
When Richard Farnsworth's name came up, bells began ringing – joyous bells! A lot of times people say someone was born to play a certain role. If there was ever a case for that, this is *it*. The film hangs on his performance. There's nobody who could have done it like he did. He has a quality, which is in all the films he's been in, that just makes you want to instantly love this guy. And you know he is so much like Alvin. He wears a hat, as Alvin did, and they're both from the rodeo.

Richard was a stunt man who got into acting and didn't consider himself to be an actor, which is completely absurd to me because he really makes the thing come alive. He fits the definition of an actor – a person who makes something real. When you're in close on Richard, the mind is engaged and your imagination goes and your heart goes and there's an interaction that



The ultimate stunt. Richard Farnsworth (as Alvin Straight) in the role of a lifetime, on location for *The Straight Story* (1999).

takes place. So much comes out in every word and every look from this man. He was just open, like a child. It's amazing what he does.

You've spoken about your father and the ten-gallon hat that he'd wear when he worked for the Department of Agriculture when you were a kid. Was that ever on your mind when you were shooting with Richard?
Sometimes Richard reminds me of my father and sometimes he doesn't. It's not something I ever thought about while shooting.

What would have happened if Richard hadn't agreed to do the movie?
You can't *think* like that, Chris! You *can't* think like that. Richard *did* do it. He almost didn't but he did, because he was *meant* to do it.

Apparently he had bone cancer. Did he know he was – I presume – terminally sick when he agreed to do the movie?
Yes, but he didn't let on *how* sick he was. It was physically very demanding for him, but he's a cowboy, you know. He kept going and never complained once. He got younger as we went on, and towards the end he was able to get out of a chair much better than before. He was proud of his work, proud that he could do it, and happy.

Henry in Eraserhead, *Jeffrey in* Blue Velvet, *Fred in* Lost Highway – *all these guys are, as you're so fond of saying, 'lost in darkness and confusion'. What was your attraction to Alvin, who doesn't seem such a desperate character?*
I love all those guys, but I love Alvin too. Alvin *had* been lost in darkness and confusion. He has a past – parts of which he could feel happy about and parts that he feels bad about. Just like everybody. But now he's doing something for himself and his brother.

You haven't worked with cinematographer Freddie Francis since the painful experience of making Dune. *Why did you choose him for* The Straight Story?
Freddie is one of the world's great DPs and he's in his eighties! *The Straight Story* is about an old man, so there was something that just felt so right about working with Freddie on this film. I think it would have been very different if it had been someone younger behind the camera. It was important to the feeling. There's also something wrong when the crew is like in its twenties and Richard Farnsworth can't get out of a chair!

130 years combined. Cinematographer Freddie Francis and David Lynch take it easy on location for *The Straight Story* (1999).

Freddie said he only wanted to work eight hours a day, but when we ended up working ten- and twelve-hour days he was leading the pack! And Richard was getting younger, and they'd see each other on either side of the camera and it really was a good thing. In Freddie's mind it's got to be fun to go out and shoot. He just can't handle going out and having a miserable experience. No one wants that. So I think he picks things pretty carefully now.

I know you'd always prefer to work with a small number of people behind the camera – ideally a five-person crew like you had on Eraserhead*! Was* The Straight Story *more of a family-sized movie?*
It was a little bit smaller, but not as small as I'd like. It was pretty great though. And then this was the first time I worked with Jack Fisk, who is my best friend, as Production Designer. It was the first time I've worked with Sissy, and I've always wanted to work with her. And working with Richard is like sitting down with your father or your memories of your grandfather.

And Richard could look behind the camera and see Freddie, older than he is, and there they all were, marching down the road together!

When Wim Wenders made road movies like Kings of the Road*, he'd shoot everything chronologically, exactly as it occurred in the script or – in his case – the 'itinerary'. Did you do that with this?*
Yes. We started filming in Laurens and began our trip at exactly the same time of year as Alvin did. I think we actually shot the movie in exactly the same sequence as things really happened, and it worked so fantastically. Richard was one way at the beginning of the shoot, and each day he got more and more of the experience of being on the road.

Also, it was the end of the summer, so as we were marching forward the leaves were changing colour. It was an extremely opportune time to be in that area. Summer was turning to fall, and that means harvest time. You've got the heat of the summer and this flat land to start with, harvesting starting as you're moving, plus fall folding in on all this as the hills appear. Our only concern was to finish before winter came because there it goes down to sixty below. It's brutal.

But when we got to the end, it was just *so beautiful*. It was such a perfect thing. It couldn't have been better. About a week later that good weather was long gone. So fate was really smiling on us. For instance, the night we shot the scene with the priest and Alvin, it happened to be a kind of a balmy night. There was a wind, but it wasn't so cold. It was a tough scene for Richard, with a lot of dialogue and stuff going on, and he was in a squat little chair. I think he was in a lot of pain too. Anyway, we finished shooting the scene at about two in the morning and just when we got all the equipment in the trucks and I was driving back, suddenly there was thunder and lightning and the most TORRENTIAL rain. It was perfect timing!

There are a lot of gorgeous colour compositions in the movie – all that green and yellow John Deere machinery, bright red wooden buildings etc. How much of that was 'found' and how much had to be art directed?
That's how they are! We didn't paint 'em! You have certain things to choose from and then a lot that's given to you. It's there. It's not a documentary but the sun is your only light, this is your landscape and there's not a lot you can fiddle around with. But you can work with it. Whenever you do a picture like this you shouldn't notice the work of the Production Designer. Jack Fisk did many, many things but it just feels right. The film could have looked a hundred different ways. It's gorgeous in a realistic way. I

Nature and man working together. Jack Fisk (Production Designer, right) helping reality to be more gorgeous on location for *The Straight Story* (1999).

like nature and man working together. So I like fire and I like glue and I like accidents that create a third thing. Many things come from accidents, or controlled accidents – even like the splitting of an atom.

One very obvious and important aspect of the movie is its pace. It's like Wild at Heart *at a fraction of the speed. Can you say something about the overt slowness of everything?*

In my mind, Alvin could have travelled in much easier ways but these would not have meant the same to his brother. His journey to me was about forgiveness and making something right. So it's not a sprinter's movie! When you've got a guy who is seventy-three in the story and the actor who – in reality – is seventy-nine, it comes out of the story. He's not driving a Corvette or a Dodge Charger; he's driving a lawnmower with a top speed of 5 miles an hour. So that opens up another whole world. When we took the first trip for the recce, we would sometimes crawl by the side of the road, but the car would hardly go that slow. Even if you took your foot off the accelerator and just coasted, you'd still be going at least 15 miles an hour. The speedometer won't even *hover* at 5; it doesn't KNOW that area! So you have to use the brake. And when you slow down, you see things differently. We took the same amount of time crossing over to Mount Zion

as Alvin did. He was going at 4 miles an hour – so slow you can see the texture of the road. It's *unbelievable.*

We had three different lawnmowers on the set and I'd ride on all of them. They're very fun to drive. A lot of farmers collect old tractors and lawnmowers and have shows – like vintage-car rallies. People just love them and I see why.

It's all very different from the fast, exhilarating highway shot that announces the opening of Lost Highway *– part of a frenetic journey that's never going to make anything all right.*

You bet! And I remember that to get that particular shot, Steadicam Dan was on the camera truck and they had a kind of cow-catcher rig on the front and it was pitch-black at night. It was about ten degrees and we had to go at 35 miles an hour and we had to go at that speed for at least 25 minutes, because we were shooting at six frames per second so that when it was projected the shot would last four or five minutes. We were in Nevada on these two-lane roads at night so they've got to be EMPTY, and we've got to maintain that speed. And Steadicam Dan has got the camera *9 inches* off the asphalt! He can't *move* for 25 minutes and it's *freezing* and we've got wind-chill factor blowing on him and there's NOTHING in front of him. He couldn't have moved even if he *wanted* to when that shot was over. He was *frozen* through and through – like a BURGER! He was a hero.

With *The Straight Story* I wanted the film to have a floating feeling. I particularly wanted that quality to come through in the aerial landscape shots, and it took a lot of explaining to get the helicopter pilots to slow down enough to get the look I was after.

Knowing how you like to play music when you're actually shooting a scene – to help the actors 'catch' a mood – how did being on the road all the time affect the relationship you like to foster between the music and the film?

Well, we didn't really start the music until post-production began. I didn't play back music during shooting so much on this. I did at times, but I can't remember what it was now. But there's music in the air out there. It's really beautiful. If you take your car and pull off the road and you kill the engine and walk away from the car – because the ticks of the engine just drive you NUTS – if you just listen to the wind and the insects, it's like music. It's so quiet except for those two things.

The music of wind and insects. David Lynch on location for *The Straight Story* (1999).

Angelo Badalamenti's music for the film is beautiful but, as one might expect in this case, it's very different from the kind of score he's done for you in the past. Did you have to work out a new way of working on this?

No. We get together and sit down and I talk to him – because he wants me to talk about a mood. And he plays as I talk. I keep having to stop him. He lifts his hands off the keys and I say 'Angelo . . .' and I'll change my words and then he goes again. And then I say 'No, no, no, it's like . . .' and say different words. Because those words are giving us the music. And then he starts playing something and we're off and running. And it's literally three or four tries, because he's interpreting those words, and as we zero in closer and closer he'll hit a thread that is *it*. And then he expands on that thread and goes. We recorded all the music for *The Straight Story* in my own studio. Angelo was conducting fourteen great musicians. There was a clock running because we had a deadline, but we had the freedom of knowing that, if people didn't just collapse with fatigue, we could just keep going if we were on a roll.

All the same film things were at work, but this was more pared down, and there weren't a lot of lines going forward. That made it a lot harder because there was nowhere to hide. There were just a couple of things going on so you couldn't veer off the highway.

So in the mix I got all fixated not only on *where* the music came in but *how* it came in. It's all a tricky business, and it gets harder and harder to feel it because you lose objectivity. But say you come in, in the morning, and you're pretty fresh and it's a new scene and you're feeling it, it's amazing that one frame too short or too long and the emotion goes away. It's *really* critical. An emotion can suddenly appear but if everything isn't right it doesn't appear!

Nothing in this world is perfect, but you try anyway, so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. There is a magic that happens sometimes when each element is correct and that's what you work towards. Film to me is like music in the way it deals with things happening in sequence. Certain events have to precede others in a certain way for it to work.

Slowing everything down for this film puts me very much in mind of things you've said in the past about the need to slow the entire world down on occasion so that you can sink into deep waters and find the good ideas. Isn't that what you use meditation for?

Well, it's so beautiful what meditation does in so many departments. It's profound and yet it's simple. It's so in parallel with sex in a strange way.

What do you mean?

I can explain that! It's like this: you're a tree and you're in petty good shape, but some of your leaves are a little brown. There's some blight on some of them and the limbs are a little saggy. *Not* super healthy. The trunk is even a little funky. That's the condition most of us are in. And then you discover that the roots are *not* in the nourishment. If you could get the roots in the nourishment then automatically all aspects of the tree are going to come up. And they're going to come up to perfection.

The nourishment is the 'unified field'. Modern science has discovered the unified field. They say it's there. It's known by many different names of course – 'the absolute', 'the unmanifest', 'pure bliss consciousness', 'transcendental consciousness' – many names. It is unity. It's the thing that never had a beginning, and will never have an end. It's knowingness. It's pure creative intelligence. It is the one and only thing. It's the universe and it's all of us, and it permeates all manifestation. That's the nourishment.

In transcendental meditation, the mantra takes the mind through all the layers of relativity and allows you to get to the shore of relativity and – *whoosh* – you go in. You transcend into the absolute. And you wish you could stay, but you pop out again.

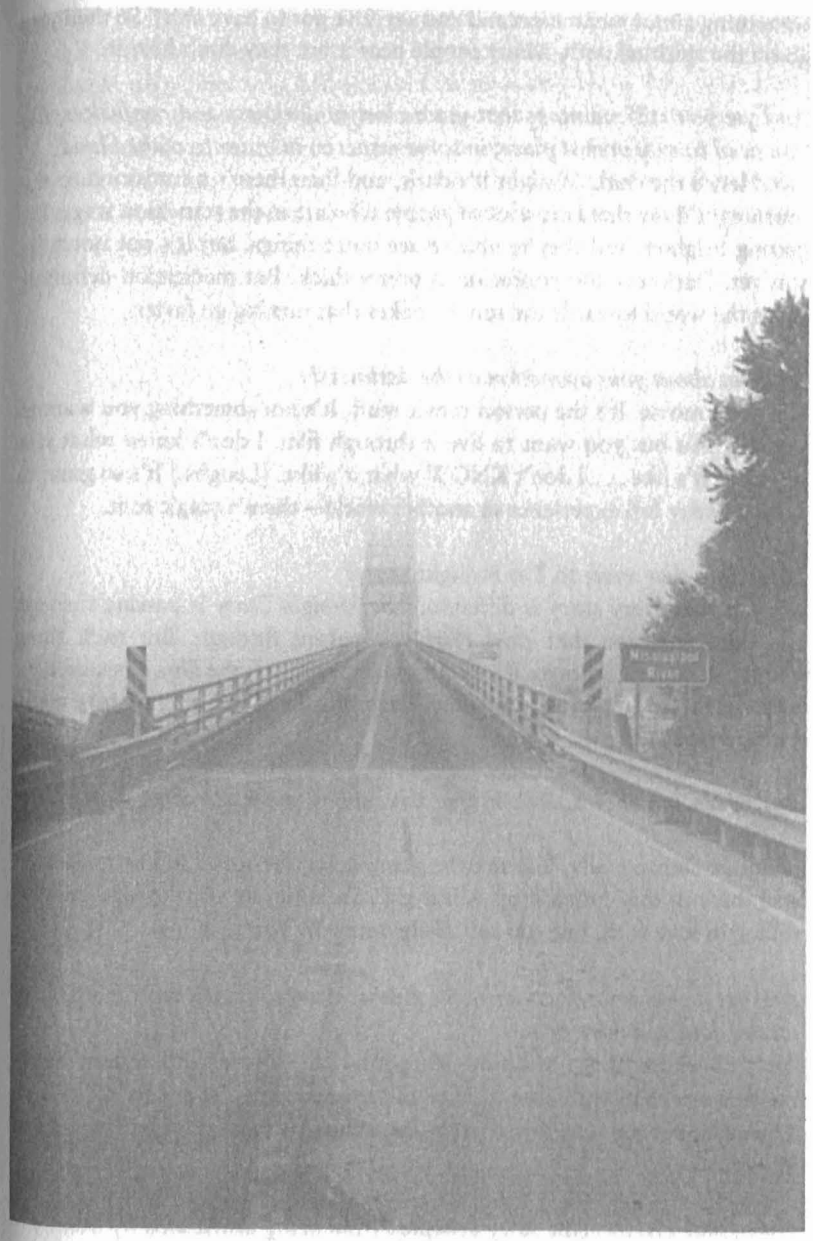
There're two different kinds of 'sammatis'. There's the major sammati, which is enlightenment – you're there full time – and there's the little sammati. What I'm talking about is the little sammati. Bang, you're in. And then you're out again. In so doing, you release stress from the nervous system, purifying the nervous system. You've got to clean the machine and infuse it with the nourishment. And little by little, day in and day out, twenty minutes every morning and evening, that process takes place until you reach the point where you can say: 'I am *that*.' You are already, but you don't know it. And now you're dealing with a full deck and things are beautiful.

All humans have that potential, but you've got to do something about it. You can't be on the surface of life and pretend. It's like a thirsty man pretending he's not thirsty. You've got to drink the water.

How do you learn to do this?
You can learn it from any teacher of TM. When you buy a Rolls-Royce it doesn't matter who the salesman is, you drive out with a Rolls-Royce! So that's how it goes.

But how do you prove that all of this stuff actually exists?
Here's the deal. No one will ever prove anything like this because it's a subjective experience. Maybe I'll tell you this story. I won't say the name of the person involved – it *is* a great name but anyway . . . Well, the name is Dick. I'll just call him Dick. Well Dick was like *real* mature. He was in the sixth grade and he had almost got a *beard* he was so mature. Anyway, this other kid told me that Dick was in the men's room with a hard on and was rubbing his penis and that white stuff came out the end of his penis. This was told to me. And I said ' You've gotta be kiddin' me! You've gotta be kiddin' me! What kind of a story is *this?* That's *impossible*. Is there something wrong with him, maybe? What is the *deal?*' But at the same time there was some faint glimmer of knowing the truth of it. It didn't make any sense, and yet there was some faint glimmer that this was something that I knew about or that was truthful. So I tried this, and I could not BELIEVE that it was true, but it *was*.

That's why I say that meditation is the same kind of thing as sex in a way. It is completely real, but it has to do with *you*. It's not a thing that can be told to you in a way that will prove it. You might say, 'I don't believe this and I don't want it.' But with every human being there comes a certain point when you become a seeker, and you say 'something else is out there that's bigger. It's like a mystery and I know it's there' and then maybe you hear



The transition to morning. On the road to Mount Zion for *The Straight Story* (1999).

something about meditation and you say 'I've got to have *that*!' So then you go on the spiritual path. Many people hear it but they don't hear it.

And yet you still maintain that you're lost in darkness and confusion. Do you need to stay in that place, in some respects, in order to make films?
No. Here's the deal. At night it's dark, and then there's a transition to the morning. I'd say there are a lot of people who are in the transition stage. It's getting brighter, and they're able to see more things, but it's not noonday sun yet. Darkness and confusion is pretty thick. But meditation definitely turns the world towards the sun. It makes that turning go faster.

So what about your attraction to the darkness?
It's like a movie. It's the perfect movie stuff. It's not something you want to actually *live* but you want to live it through film. I don't know what it is about it. It's like . . . I don't KNOW what it's like. [Laughs.] It's so great to have a pretty full experience in another world – there's magic to it.

How does that relate to The Straight Story*?*
It's just that every story is different. *The Straight Story* is passing through the same machine that *Lost Highway* passed through. But each thing should be seen on its own. If I didn't put my name on the film, I'm sure a lot of people wouldn't know it was me. Theoretically, *The Straight Story* could be my first film!

But, given the choice, isn't it true that you're more attracted to the dark stuff?
It's not a choice really. You may be going down the street and turn a corner and there in this coffee shop is this girl. She's not at all who you imagine falling in love with, but you can't help yourself. You're in love.

And yet if you write or co-write the movie, chances are it's more likely to be on the darker, wilder side.
That's because of the machine. It's gonna fall in love with certain things much easier than with other things. But the key is you've got to fall in love. The avenue is too long and there's so much there to deal with if you're not in love.

Given that The Straight Story *benefited from being distributed by Disney in the States, was a massive critical success, and was a 'life-affirming' story, I'm surprised that it didn't do better at the box office.*

I always thought that every picture I made was going to be a mainstream movie. You have a feeling that if you like something, maybe others will too, although sometimes you kid yourself more than others. My films don't make enough money to even appear on the radar of the big studios. What makes them sit up and begin to think is money, and the bigger the money the more they, you know, sit up very straight. I always think that maybe there's a story that would really please me and that would also make money. I just haven't hit it.

11

Billy Finds a Book of Riddles Right in His Own Back Yard

Mulholland Drive

'Probably', 'possibly' and 'maybe': these three words inevitably arise again and again in any attempt to describe the delicious puzzle that is *Mulholland Drive*. That's three words more than Lynch himself is inclined to offer when it comes to explaining the movie. To get an idea of this reluctance, one need look no further than his synopsis: 'Part one: she found herself inside the perfect mystery. Part two: a sad illusion. Part three: love.' In other words, 'Don't ask.'

'*Vertigo* on Valium', 'Raymond Chandler in *Alice in Wonderland*': such evocative but vague journalistic soundbites have often been applied to this film, since to write an 'accurate' account of all its operations, meaning and detail is impossible. *Mulholland Drive* seems to defy waking logic, and yet it looks and feels all of a piece – strangely seamless and complete, even as it slips past your reasoning powers and through your fingers.

Lynch is unwilling/unable (in exactly what proportion one can only guess) to analyse the movie because he knows that if the 'truth' were revealed, the dream that is *Mulholland Drive* would die. In this respect words are the movie's enemy – Lynch's own pronouncements potentially being the deadliest of all. He's also sensitive to the fact that *Mulholland Drive* was – in a previous life – the pilot episode for a proposed television series. Comparing the version eventually rejected by ABC to the expanded, feature-length film (looking at exactly what was added and what was cut out etc.) is also forbidden territory. Unpicking the film in this way could lead to its being viewed as a salvage operation, and this is far from the truth.

For Lynch, the only *Mulholland Drive* that exists is the movie that premiered in Cannes in 2001. For us too. And what is so remarkable about the film is precisely how certain elements that were meant to settle in over a season or two on television are made to give a plausible account of themselves from scratch in a two-hour movie. It's a striking example of emergent evolution at work, as if Lynch had been forced to jump directly from the TV pilot episode of *Twin Peaks* to the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* – without the benefit of all the intricate plot and character development in between. *Mulholland Drive* is (in the main) made up of a re-edited TV pilot plus fifty minutes or so of additional material shot nearly two years later. However, it was in the very process of re-imagining *Mulholland Drive* – of having to turn an open-ended story into

something that offers a degree of closure – that Lynch somehow 'discovered' his most deliriously radical work.

If the menacing mantra of *Twin Peaks* was the phrase 'Fire, walk with me', the haunting refrain in *Muholland Drive* is 'This is the girl' – a phrase which accumulates different meanings in the movie depending on who says it, and when. What begins as a vaguely menacing statement when first heard is finally transformed into a clear but deadly directive when filtered through the film's increasingly complex revelations.

With *Mulholland Drive* Lynch adopts *Lost Highway*'s Möbius strip approach to narrative but twists the story even further into a spiral. Are the first two-thirds of the film – in which Hollywood *ingénue* Betty Elms tries to help the amnesiac Rita discover her real identity – a 'dream'? Is the final third – in which Betty turns into the suicidal loser and drug addict Diane Selwyn, and Rita becomes her treacherous lesbian lover Camilla Rhodes – 'reality'? Or is it the other way round, perhaps?

The answer to all three questions could equally be 'yes' and 'no'. In the first two-thirds of *Mulholland Drive* – Diane's possible wish-fulfilling 'dream' – the narrative is both coherent and fluid, neither of which are particularly dreamlike qualities. Nor does this transfiguring 'dream' seem to take place at any specific point in her life, as such fantasies do in movies. Even Fred Madison's 'psychogenic fugue' in *Lost Highway* obeys this convention (taking place in his prison cell). Conversely, Diane's possible sordid 'reality' – the last third of the film – *is* presented like a dream (or nightmare): discontinuous, abstracted and fevered. Either section of the movie could, in fact, be read as a version of the other's reality. They constantly speak to each other as equal partners, while simultaneously threatening to expose each other for what they are.

It seems that with *Mulholland Drive* Lynch has made the very notion of 'dream' *versus* 'reality' an irrelevant opposition. As a result the borderline between these two states has been reduced to a badly guarded checkpoint where no one seems to be stamping passports. This tastes like a new recipe, for which Lynch has used his secret ingredients in unexpected proportions. Its flavour is something like one-third 'reality', two-thirds 'evaded reality' and just a dash of 'future reality'. But sometimes it tastes less bitter – more like a dream within an illusion, sweetened by a dollop of desire and garnished with a premonition.

Home of the Hollywood 'dream factory' Los Angeles is, in many respects, the controlling intelligence and main character in *Mulholland Drive*. It's a place where everyone dreams of being someone – or something – else. It can make a few of those dreams come true, while shattering the rest. It's the city where many would-be actors have two names – the one they were given at birth and the one created especially for their successful other selves. It's a town full of ghosts and haunted houses – virtually every small apartment and every gated mansion was at one time occupied by someone who eventually became

famous, died trying to get there or, like Norma Desmond in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, faded sadly into obscurity.

At once fickle, fragile and fake, LA is no more than a highly cultivated crust on a corner of the Mojave Desert. If all of the city's sprinklers were turned off, it would eventually return to sand. But in *Mulholland Drive* it seems to spit back some of the creative juice and effort that has been generated to such excess by its dream-chasing inhabitants. Its history is so short that the past and present almost co-exist. It feels like only yesterday (1932) that bit-part actress Peg Entwistle hanged herself from the Hollywood sign when she failed to get a studio contract. It was only a moment before that (1913) that ruthless engineer William Mulholland was director of water and power in LA. The road that took his name, the road we find ourselves on now, is still haunted by the mad, sad, bad spirits of A-, B- and Z-list actors, revisiting the sites of their murders, suicides and orgies – still smiling for the camera, craving their final close-ups.

This strong personality accorded to place is, of course, typical of Lynch's work. Just as this movie seems to come from the city's point of view – as if it were generating the characters and stories happening in its own back yards – the bizarre and violent events that took place in and around the small town of Twin Peaks were a direct expression of mysterious forces that dwelt in that particular landscape. They *were* the place, and the place was the star of the show. The series wasn't called 'The Life and Death of Laura Palmer', just as *Mulholland Drive* isn't called 'The Diane Selwyn Story'. That particular movie is being made under the title 'The Sylvia North Story', by fictional directors Adam Kesher and Bob Booker, within the tangled narrative of *Mulholland Drive* itself. Probably.

The movie makes detectives of us all, but we have to be like Special Agent Dale Cooper – prepared to use not only our intellect but also our spiritual and intuitive powers – in order to 'sense' a logical core to *Mulholland Drive* that works for us. My own detective has filed his case notes. Much of the evidence is circumstantial and the conclusions hard to 'prove'. Recently a couple of scribbled comments in a margin of those notes caught my eye. One is a reminder that Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* is a movie told by a corpse floating face down in an LA swimming pool. The other refers to a comment made by Lynch that appears earlier in this very book. At one time, he agreed to direct a film, to be written by his *Twin Peaks* partner Mark Frost, based on Anthony Summers' book *Goddess: the Secret Lives of Marilyn Monroe*. It never happened: 'I loved the idea of this woman in trouble,' Lynch says, 'but I didn't know if I liked it being a real story.'

Marilyn was, of course, found dead in suspicious circumstances – lying on her bed in a semi-foetal position. She was supposed to have had Mob connections. Hers was an unhappy childhood, and apparently she feared being genetically prone to insanity. She once noted that – as a Gemini – she was 'Jekyll and

Hyde. Two in one.' She was even diagnosed as being a 'borderline' personality. 'Borderlines' are emotionally unstable, excessively impulsive and dependent on constant external approval. They crave applause and become extremely depressed when rejected by others. Marilyn's lifelong friend, the poet Norman Rosten, is quoted at the beginning of *Goddess*: 'Hollywood, the dream factory, had created a dream girl. Could she awaken to reality? And what was the reality? Was there a life for her outside the dream?'

This is the girl – probably, possibly, maybe.

RODLEY: *Thinking of* Wild at Heart, The Straight Story, Lost Highway *and now* Mulholland Drive, *the road seems to figure prominently in your movies.*

LYNCH: And Fellini's *La Strada* is one of my favourite films! A road, I've been thinking, is a moving forward into the unknown, and that's compelling to me. That's also what films are – the lights go down, the curtain opens and away we go, but we don't know where we're going.

You live just off Mulholland Drive. It's part of your neighbourhood. You also used it as the location for the Mr Eddy/tailgating scene in Lost Highway. *Is there something about it that particularly attracts you?*

Yes. It's a beautiful road that goes along the crest of the Santa Monica mountains and gives you vistas over the valley on one side and Hollywood on the other. It's a mysterious road with many curves in it. It's really dark at night and, unlike so many other spots in LA, it has remained pretty much the same over the years.

Unlike Mulholland Drive *the movie, which has gone through many changes.*

Well, there's a history. After *Twin Peaks*, or somewhere in the *Twin Peaks* time, there was this idea for a spin-off show called *Mulholland Drive*. Mark Frost and I were going to do it, but it never went anywhere – but the name stuck. Nothing was ever written and nothing was ever discussed. It was just that – the name. Mark is still connected to *Mulholland Drive* because we had a deal that if I ever used the name, he would get something. I hope he has!

Then I tried to get it started again in the mid-nineties, and worked a little bit with the writer Bob Engels, but nothing ever happened. It was just a kind of continuing of the hope, and then it went away completely.

So what eventually did get it kick-started?
My former agent Tony Krantz said, 'Why don't you do a new television show called *Mulholland Drive*?' If he hadn't have said that, I would never have done anything with it, so that was a good thing.

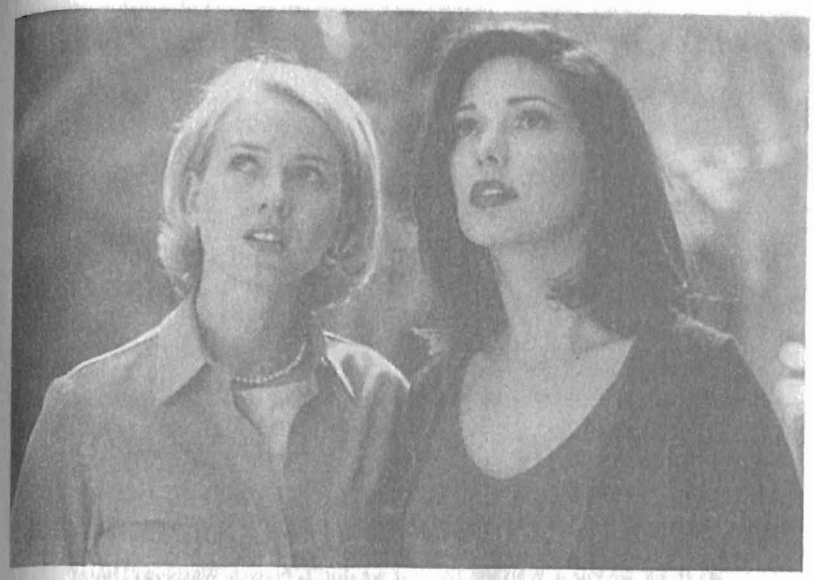
Like the phrase 'lost highway' started you thinking about that particular film?
Exactly. It was just those words 'Mulholland Drive'. When you say some words, pictures form, and in this case what formed was what you see at the beginning of the film – a sign at night, headlights on the sign and a trip up a road. This makes me dream, and these images are like magnets and they pull other ideas to them.

So how did you first pitch the idea to ABC as a potential TV series?
I just had two pages that were read to them, and then more pitch stuff to give them a mood and more of a thing. And at that point they were all saying 'Sounds great. Let's do it.'

But what was on those two pages?
A couple of things: a woman trying to become a star in Hollywood, and at the same time finding herself becoming a detective and possibly going into a dangerous world.

As the idea developed in your mind, what was it about Mulholland Drive *that made you fall in love with it?*
If someone said to you, 'What was it about that girl that really made you fall in love with her?' you couldn't say just one thing. It's so many things. It's everything. Same with this. You get an idea. A moment before, it wasn't there. And it comes SO FAST! And when you get the idea it sometimes comes with an inspiration, an energy, that fires you up. Maybe the love is *in* the idea, and it just comes into you. I don't know. But the idea is really small and then it expands and shows itself to you so you see it completely. And then it goes to the memory bank so that you can examine it some more. It's very complete. It's like a seed. The tree is really there, but it's not a tree yet. It wants to be a tree, but it's just a seed.

Sometimes an idea presents itself to you and you're just as surprised as anyone else. I remember when I was writing *Mulholland Drive*, the character of the Cowboy just came walking in one night. I just started talking about this cowboy. That's what happens – something starts occurring but it wasn't there a moment ago.



She found herself inside the perfect mystery. Betty Elms (Naomi Watts), the blonde in *Vertigo* grey, with the forties femme-fatale-style Rita (Laura Elena Harring) in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

Do you then get anxious about how this idea is going to fit in with everything else?
No, because you're just in that world yourself. You're just going. There is no movie yet. Until the process completes itself, you're just going to carry on. Somewhere along the way, when it looks like it's taking some sort of shape, the rest of the ideas all gather round to see if they can fit into that shape. Maybe you'll find out that that thing isn't going to work, so you save it in a box for later.

You've got to be the audience for most of this trip. You can't second-guess them. If you did, you'd be removing yourself from yourself. Then you'd be out there in really dangerous territory, trying to build something for some abstract group that's always changing. I think you'd fail. You've got to do it from the inside first and hope for the best.

Tell me about the character of Diane – or Betty – as there are two differently named characters both played by Naomi Watts. What do we call her?
This particular girl – Diane – sees things she wants but she just can't get them. It's all there – the party – but she's not invited. And it gets to her. You

We think we know who we are, but we don't. Naomi Watts (as Diane Selwyn/Betty Elms) talks identity crisis with David Lynch on the set of *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

could call it Fate – if it doesn't smile on you, there's *nothing* you can do. You can have the greatest talent and the greatest ideas, but if that door doesn't open, you're fresh out of luck. It takes so many ingredients *and* the door opening, to finally make it.

There are jokes about how in LA everyone is writing a script and everyone has got a résumé and a photo. So there's a *yearning* to get the chance to express yourself – a sort of creativity in the air. Everyone is willing to go for broke and take a chance. It's a modern town in that way. It's like you want to go to Las Vegas and turn that one dollar into a million dollars. *Sunset Boulevard* says so much about that Hollywood dream thing to me.

Did you ever feel that way about this town yourself – that it was the place to make your career as a film-maker?

No. I came in through a weird door and I didn't really know about it. I arrived here in August 1970 at night, and I woke up in the morning and I'd never seen the light so bright. A feeling comes with this light – a feeling of creative freedom. So for me it was almost an immediate full-tilt love affair from then on. Hopefully, everybody finds a place where they feel good

about being where they are – a place that does something to them. That's LA to me.

There have been so many great movies made about this town, and about Hollywood in particular. Was it difficult imagining how to make one that was significantly different from what had gone before?

I don't think you can set out by saying, 'I'm going to make a movie about this town.' The ideas for *Mulholland Drive* just happened to present themselves and they were about a slice of this town, and that's the best you can do. There's no way anyone can say everything. It's always a slice, but that slice can have harmonics that feel pretty good. But it's not the whole picture. And the picture always changes anyway.

You've mentioned Billy Wilder's Sunset Boulevard. *Did you think about that movie a lot when you were writing or shooting* Mulholland Drive?

No. I'm sure there are things that are swimming in us that we love. We might love them because our machine is a certain way to begin with and so it's hard to say which comes first. I love Hollywood and the whole thing of the Golden Age and *Sunset Boulevard* captured that so well. I just love that world. I love it. I love it when William Holden and Nancy Olsen go for a walk on the studio back lot at night. That's probably never quite happened in exactly that way, but it *should* have. It should be going on *right this minute*! Working late at night in those writers' rooms. It should be going on *right now*! It's just too *beautiful* – every part of it. So that's always alive, but I didn't really think about it.

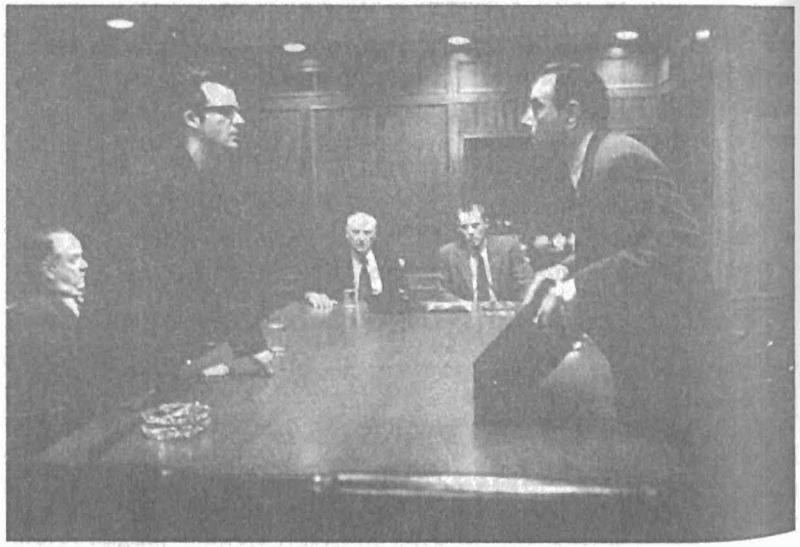
LA is much more than Hollywood, but Hollywood does play a big part in it. There are a lot of films set in LA – because people work here – but a lot of them could have happened somewhere else. *Sunset Boulevard* had to happen here.

And you have included some specific references, or allusions to Wilder's movie in your own.

There's a shot in *Mulholland Drive* of a street sign that says 'Sunset Boulevard'. I would have loved to put a small piece of the original music in there. And there is a shot of the Paramount Gates, but Paramount won't let you show their logo any more. You can only show the bit of the gate below it. It's one of their rules and I think it's a really stupid rule. But the car that you see in that shot in *Mulholland Drive* is the actual *Sunset Boulevard* car. I think it was found in Vegas.

Wilder's movie is very obviously an attack – if an occasionally affectionate one – on Hollywood and the studio system that defined it at that time. Was Mulholland Drive *in any sense intended to be a satire about the industry?*
Mulholland Drive is about more than Hollywood, but it does touch on an aspect of it. Some people have seen satirical elements in the film. I hadn't really thought about it as such, but there is some satire swimming around in the mix. I certainly didn't set out to include any, but ideas come with many threads. Just like life, sometimes there's laughter in the morning and tears in the afternoon – you never know what's going to happen. It's beautiful to move through different moods and feelings based on the ideas that are coming along.

The scene of movie director Adam Kesher in that boardroom meeting at Ryan Entertainment does seem to have the feel of an authentic, personal experience though.
Of course. I think most movie directors have had that experience. I always worry about someone forcing me to do things, because I identify so much with my work. If certain demands go against what I believe to be correct,



Creative disagreement. Director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) does boardroom battle with Vincenzo Castigliane (Dan Hedaya) in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

it's a horror. And I worry about these things. If you don't have final cut, you can lose your way very quickly and die the slow, agonizing death.

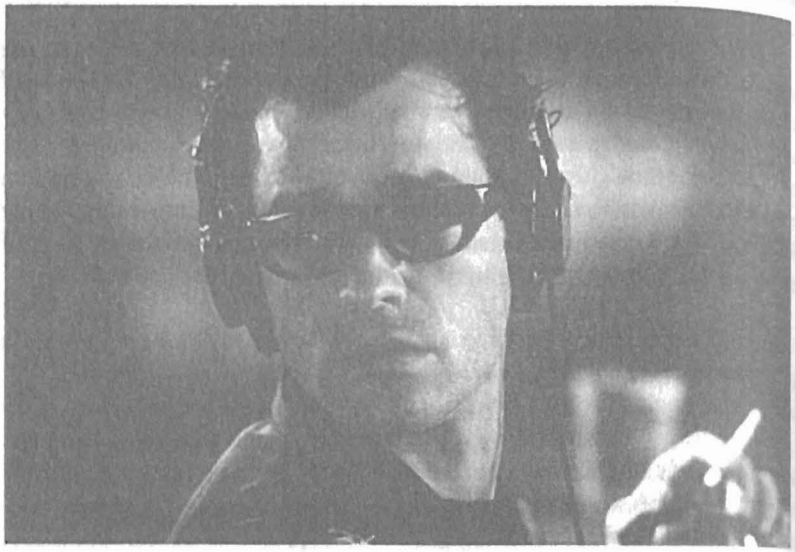
But I think *everybody* knows that situation. That's the point: there are some things that, even if you haven't experienced them yourself, you sort of know them and understand them when you do see them. I think everybody has had that experience – where you think you've got a situation under control and suddenly you begin to get the feeling that you're a pawn in a much bigger game. There's probably so much going on that we don't know about. This is a hair of a paranoia, but it could be true that secret meetings are going on all the time, and that big things are being decided at them.

As with Twin Peaks, *your casting agent Johanna Ray managed to find a whole bunch of amazing actors – over fifty speaking parts for the pilot.*
If you're casting for television, you look to a different pool of actors. They have to be people who will be with the project for a long time, so like I say, that kind of cuts Harrison Ford out of the loop! But there is such a goldmine of talent in this town it's amazing.

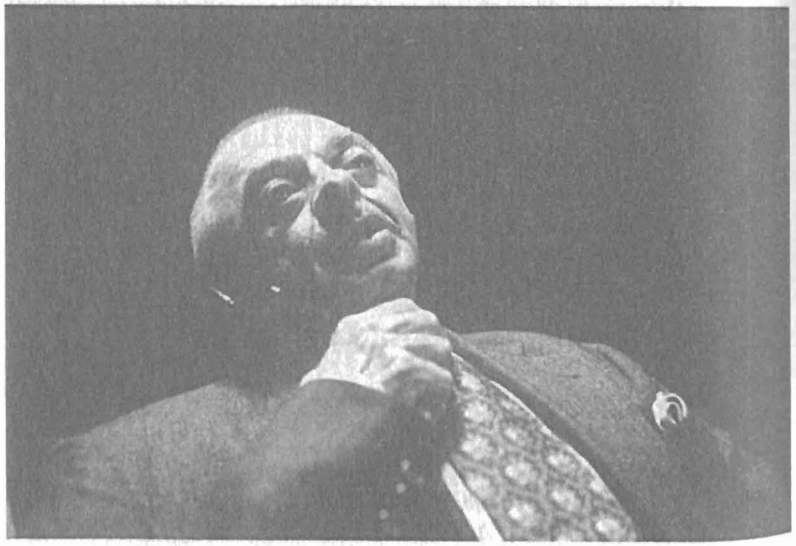
Johanna is such a friend to actors. She has people she *loves*, like family. One of the few things about her is that if she says someone is a good actor, I trust her. So it's a given that everyone I'm seeing is going to be OK in that department, and I'm just looking for the right person for the role. I have her videotape them and talk to them first. She lets them tell their story for five minutes or so and then I'll see them. But strange things often happen. I was listening to Billy Ray Cyrus, even though he wasn't on the list for this particular role in *Mullholland Drive*, and I said 'Hey, that's Gene the pool man right there.' So there are beautiful, happy accidents.

It's so fantastic talking to actors. I've heard some incredible stories from them – *incredible stories*. And then suddenly a whole new character presents itself, but it's not for this movie, say. So you've got to remember those things. When I first met Grace Zabriskie I found out that she was from New Orleans. She started doing a kind of Cajun talk and *whoosh* – some years go by and she's that character in *Wild at Heart*.

Some characters in Mulholland Drive, *like Robert Forster's detective – and even Justin Theroux's Adam Kesher – feel like they were destined for more important roles had the TV series gone ahead. Is that true?*
I don't know exactly, because I'd only thought about the pilot. At a certain point I think ABC wanted me to give them some ideas about where it might go, and so I just ran out a couple of storylines for them. But the cool thing about a continuing story – for me anyway – is that when the pilot is



Director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) on set, stranded between Camilla Rhodes and Betty Elms in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).



The Man from Another Place returns. Michael J. Anderson (in a prosthetic body) as Mr Roque in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

finished, then you can feel it. There it is, right in front of you – all the mood, all the characters, and all the things you've learnt by doing it. Only then are you really able to see where it wants to go. It's so much fun. Then you react to that, and you get ideas through the doing. It's pulling you into a mystery.

You can say a lot of things up front, but some of those things may never happen and a whole new thing might happen instead. It's so beautiful not knowing where it's going at first, and to discover it through action and reaction. It would be great if you could work like that all the time. I don't blame people for wanting to know what's going to happen next – they're bankrolling it, and it's a huge expense. But it would be no fun if you knew everything up front. It would just be a job.

The story features a number of characters who are like little abstractions of badness, or fear, or organized crime – like the Cowboy and the mysterious Mr Roque in his glass-fronted chamber at Ryan Entertainment. Can you say something about the scariest: that horrible, blackened derelict behind Winkies?

OK, here's the deal. Denny's restaurant on Sunset used to be a place called The Copper Penny. It was right at Gower and Sunset. I think that's where Frank Capra worked, and in the old days that was the corner where all the movie extras would line up in the morning for work. And the Denny's there was a pretty strange Denny's. I'm not positive, but I think there was a satanic booth in the parking lot there for a while.

What's that?

I don't know! But I used to go there and have breakfast – a Grand Slam. Anyway, I was in a booth and I think I was alone and behind me there were three people, and they were talking about God. It sounded like quite a pleasant Sunday morning conversation. And I got up to pay the cheque and I glanced over at the people in the booth and there was the Head of the Satanic Church in the booth. They were talking quite friendly and nice. I thought it was like a church group! And so it was kind of strange. Anyway, there were some kind of heavy feelings at that Denny's and that fed into this thing in *Mulholland Drive* – this bum.

Something that makes that whole telling of the nightmare so unsettling is the way the camera seems to be floating ever so slightly up and down. It makes you feel seasick.

That was always part of the idea, part of the nightmare. The crew had to get

a special jib arm, and work it into a narrow diner and get it so that Peter Deming and the camera could just float. The floating never really stops; it's like drawing a figure eight for ever. It's got to keep going to get that feel. You've got to be able to say, 'Yes, that's what it should be. That's what the idea said.' You could find that it's even *better* than what the idea said, but you shouldn't ever say, 'It's less than what the idea said, but let's go with it.' That can't happen.

So do you plan a lot of the technical side of camera with Peter in advance?
We talk before shooting starts, but a lot of that talk is baloney. Peter has an open mind. Even if he thinks something is a stupid experiment, he'll go for it and try stuff. I could get a screwball idea and ten minutes later they're scrambling around, completely happy to try it out. So there's no pressure put on you and you can really feel good about just looking around to catch something.

I'm always intrigued by the exact time frame in a lot of your films. Lost Highway *seemed to occupy at least two completely different decades.* Mulholland Drive *is also defiantly contemporary and yet it has a feeling that it's happening in the past – the fifties or even the thirties and forties.*
But that's so much like our actual lives. Many times during the day we plan for the future, and many times in the day we think of the past. We're listening to retro radio, and watching retro TV. There are all kinds of opportunities to re-live the past and there are new things coming up every second. There is some kind of present, but the present is the most elusive, because it's going real fast.

There are still many places you could go in LA to catch the drift of the old golden age, but they're getting fewer. It's like the old oil well that used to be where the Beverly Center is now. That was one of the locations we used for *Eraserhead* and it was one of my favourite places in the whole world. You'd go over this doughnut of earth and down inside this place and you'd be in a completely different world. There were these oil tanks and this working oil well just standing there. It was just incredible. There was a pony ride from the twenties or the thirties. And there was this little key shop that was like 4 feet by 4 feet with a roof. And then there was the 'Tail of the Pup' hotdog stand, which has moved to another place now. And there was Hull Brothers' Lumber that was a working sawmill, I think, with a 100-foot-tall mound of sawdust next to it. There was also a nursery. It was all like from the thirties – mostly dirt with this stuff scattered around. The buildings were ancient and guys wore those green-coloured visors and

armbands. They were old timers, who knew about wood and Hollywood and everything.

Why are you attracted to all of that?
For me, it's a thing that I felt as a kid in 'Our Gang' comedies – the Little Rascals. It was *feeling* the thirties – a feeling of a place back in time, because it hadn't changed. It was like a set. This place just existed there. And then it was gone. It became the Beverly Center. Now it's just like a congestion of shops and parking and lights and signs. It's just a huge change.

Once you'd started shooting the pilot, did ABC bother you, or did they leave you alone?
The shooting went great, but anyone who gets a certain amount of power in this business says, 'I want to see the dailies.' So what happened was that videotapes of the dailies were sent to them. In the old days dailies were sacred, and only a few people saw them. That's because dailies are like a mountainside – a *lot* of worthless rocks and then some gold. But it sort of all looks the same, unless you're able to discern the gold. So you say to them, 'You can't discern the gold', but then they say, 'Baloney! We *can* discern the gold. We don't know for sure that *you* can discern the gold!'

So they look at all this stuff and it makes them panic, and depresses them and makes them worry! [Laughs.] Those very same pieces put together properly would possibly make them feel very happy, especially if they haven't seen all the stuff that went before and that is now clouding the future for them in a negative way. And yet they feel that they have the right to do it, and that if they don't, they feel they're missing out on something and that they're not powerful. It's a weird thing.

In dailies you're just looking for those parts that work – to know that you've got the stuff. You know you went again on Take 3 because Takes 1 and 2 weren't all there, because you're looking for that little extra thing. But they don't know that. They just see some things that aren't right and they think 'Jeez, maybe Dave's gonna use *those* bits.' It clogs them up so that nothing is ever fresh for them.

So what did ABC make of the show when they eventually saw a cut?
Well first off, one of the executives said he wanted to see it *before* he went to work. This was when it was longer, and he wanted to see it BEFORE he went to work! Afterwards, he said he almost fell asleep *standing up* looking at it, it was SO boring! So it wasn't a good thing, and it died the death. They rejected that version pretty much right out of the gate.

Were there efforts to keep it alive as a TV series?
Well, the pilot was being finished at exactly the same time as we were finishing *The Straight Story* and I was told that I could make it long. Then, at the last minute, I was told that it had to run to *eighty-eight minutes*. Eighty-eight minutes for a *two-hour slot*! So you've got thirty-two minutes-worth of advertising and *eighty-eight minutes* for your show!

At that point I think the cut was around *two hours and five minutes*! I was kind of hoping to talk to them about maybe a three-hour time slot. [Laughs.] So *that* went out the window. Then I had this other idea to cut the film in two and just make the first half the pilot – with a nice pace and a mood. But they didn't go for *that*, so it had to be this eighty-eight-minute thing – the garbage-compacter thing. You know what I mean? We had to do a *butcher* job – really a BUTCHER job. It was squeezed down and down and it was NOT a pretty thing. Not at ALL! It was A NIGHTMARE!!

How did ABC then respond to that *version?*
I haven't got a *clue* what was in their brains. They never called me, they never spoke to me. They never even sent a little postcard with a picture of themselves on it, waving. *Nothing*. They did call other people to say they didn't want it. I found out it wasn't a 'go' about two hours before I got on a

'There's a black cloud chasing you.' David Lynch directs Laura Elena Harring (as Rita) in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

plane to Cannes with *The Straight Story*. I was taking a leak before getting in the car to go to the airport.

I don't understand human behaviour. All I know is I loved making it. Then I was forced to butcher it because we had a deadline and there wasn't time to finesse anything. It lost texture, big scenes and storylines. AND there are 300 tapes of the bad version circulating around. Lots of people have seen it, which is embarrassing because they're bad-quality tapes too.

If there could be some sort of combustion that would get rid of all the copies that still exist on tape, that would be the most *beautiful* thing to me – because it was a *heartache*. It was a bad moment. You have a lot of bad moments on the way to finishing a thing, but they're not all so public. It's a delicate business. You've got to be able to make some bad moments; you react to them and hopefully you fix them. Scientists have many, many failures and then they get their breakthrough. But it's all based on the failures.

So I thought it was dead, which was a heartache because so many ideas that I loved were being held in that dead body. But going up close, you could still hear it breathing. It was beautiful. So it was *not* a total let-down. In fact, there was a little air of euphoria at its rejection for TV, and I pay attention when I get a little air of euphoria. TV is bad picture, bad-quality sound interrupted by commercials and a heartache from the get-go. I knew it all along, especially after *Twin Peaks*. They feel the show is secondary to the commercials.

So why did you decide to flirt with TV again after the bad experiences of the past?
It's the continuing story thing that has the stupid pull. In a continuing story, not knowing where this is all taking you is thrilling. Seeing and discovering the way is a thrill. That's why I like the idea of TV, to go on a continuing who-knows-where story. So you pretend that everything's going to be OK and that all the executives are going to be on your side and it's going to go just beautifully – all because the continuing story is so compelling. But what's disturbing is to have a project that's stopped before it's finished.

You'd had exactly that kind of trouble with ABC before hadn't you? Didn't they cancel your sitcom On the Air *after only three shows?*
Yeah. It was a pretty stupid comedy, but it was funny to some people. I never really got the message then. Now I think ABC hates me. Now I've got the message.

You don't seem to feel bad about any of this.
No, because all of this doesn't matter. Everybody plays his or her own part and ABC did *Mulholland Drive* a *huge* favour by turning the pilot down. The idea just had to take that route. Looking back now I see that they were fulfilling a very important role in this project going forward to being the thing it always wanted to be. I really feel that's true. It benefited in many, many ways.

There's another thing that I haven't said to anybody . . . I don't know if I'm going say it to you. [L-O-N-G pause.] Well, it's not that big a deal. [Laughs.] TV is different from movies, and when your mind is thinking 'TV', something happens. I don't know why exactly, but for me the 'fun' quotient goes up a little bit. I think that's what it is. Then, when it starts to become something else – like a feature – it's like you're making a cake and you've got a pretty good cake going but suddenly some people are coming to dinner and this cake has got to be the main meal! So then your mind starts bringing in these little pieces of chicken, some vegetables and then, before you know it, you've got a whole new thing. This thing is healthy, but it's also kind of sweet, and then it's got some protein and vegetables in it and people are going crazy! They're eating it and they want to have the recipe!

A love story in the city of dreams. Betty Elms (Naomi Watts) and Rita (Laura Elena Harring) are briefly as one in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

But at this point, having just completed the pilot, where exactly were we in the story?
You see Chris, to me that is *not* the way to look at it. That would be like saying, 'When you were shooting, where exactly were you in your script on July 1st?' It doesn't matter, because finally, on December 1st, it all came together! The pilot was just a stage that this thing went through.

If the pilot had been accepted, would you then have made the series with a pool of other directors, as happened with Twin Peaks*?*
That was another reason I thought it was such a blessing that the idea of a TV series was dropped. You can't do a continuing story for a long time on your own. That would be the most beautiful thing, but you can't. And each individual has got his or her own voice, so as soon as you open it up to others, it's going to go off in a different direction. Those ideas that come from the actual doing are some of the most critical – sometimes super-critical – ideas. You see the way a certain thing looks because you're doing it. If you're not there, they don't happen.

Say you had a pencil sketch and you turned it over to someone else to finish it off for you. They'd maybe colour it in and show it to you and you'd say 'yep'. But if you did the conversion from pencil sketch to finished thing yourself, there could be a hundred thousand changes you'd make, because you're right in the midst of the process and you've got your hands on it. So you'll end up with something way better.

So how did you get your hands back on Mulholland Drive*?*
Pierre Edelman from the French company Studio Canal + came up here to this very studio and sat exactly where you're sitting and he said – bless his heart – 'I know I can get a copy of the pilot for *Mulholland Drive* on tape. Can I have your permission to look at it?' And I said, 'Pierre, you do NOT want to see that damn thing.' He said, 'But you want to finish it, don't you?' and I said, 'Yeah, but I don't have any ideas about *how* to finish it, and the tape is terrible. It's TERRRIBLE!' So he said, 'Just let me look at it because I've just got to know what it is.' So I said OK, because he had a real good attitude. Then he came back, maybe a day later, and said, 'I *love* this thing. I can set this up as a feature. Just say the word.' So I said, 'Let's go!' A *year* later – because there were so many companies involved – a YEAR later, Pierre got the rights.

Were there many practical problems picking something like this up again after all that time?

Yes! I remember Jack Fisk's face when the sets were taken down originally. They were built in a modular fashion, but they had to be taken apart carefully, and before he realized it, they were taken apart *not* carefully. They'd been stored in the meantime, but they needed massive work to bring them back. Then we realized that Disney had lost all the props and costumes. They'd released them 'into the stream', or lost them. So we were looking at really bad set problems, no costumes and no props. I thought: This can't work.

That was just about the time I realized that I really didn't have any ideas about *how* to finish it. [Laughs.] I'd been doing other things and I wasn't concentrating on this, not knowing for sure if it would ever happen – because it went on and on and on and on.

A pilot is a particular kind of thing. It is *not* a feature film. In fact, it goes *against* the rules of a feature film, because it starts things but it doesn't finish them. I thought it would be better just to say 'no' to the whole thing, but then I kept thinking of all the money Pierre had spent on getting the rights. It was a horrible dilemma. I was filled with tremendous fear and anxiety, because I had this great opportunity but I didn't have the ideas. So there were a lot of negatives, right there.

What saved you?

Well, one night I sat down in my chair to meditate and *whoosh* – the whole thing came to me, and I saw it! These ideas came in from six-thirty to seven and I saw a way forward based on these ideas. They were like a gift – a blessing. So I wrote some more stuff, and all the pieces that went before fitted into the new idea, and the new idea married with what went before but altered what went before. So it affected the beginning, the middle and the end. It was a miracle that those things came in that way.

Ideas never really come all at once for a whole feature anyway. They come in fragments. So you could stop at any moment and say: 'These are my fragments; how will I ever get to a whole movie from these?' But those fragments are compelling other fragments to join them. With *Mulholland Drive* I had a whole bunch of a certain type of fragment – open-ended fragments. So they needed a certain type of idea to come in and tie them all together. That was the trick.

What do you mean by 'trick'?

The Surrealists would trick themselves. They'd get a bunch of words and throw them up into the air and – this is what I imagine – they looked at the

You *were* Coco Lenoix, but now you're Adam Kesher's mother. David Lynch directs Ann Miller in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

way they landed. Or a bunch of images, and see how they landed and get ideas based on random acts. Your mind focuses on a certain thing and it pulls in ideas that will marry to that thing in a surprising way, because this is a surprising set of circumstances. And because of the particular problems I had with *Mulholland Drive*, I got certain ideas.

There's an expression 'where your attention is, that will be lively'. That's a truthful and magical expression. You could think about that for a long time. It's like the focus and the desire form this bait, and the fish – which are the ideas – are the lovely things that start swimming up there. You can catch the fish, but it's understood not to be a sure thing each time you go looking for them.

Did all the ideas you needed to consolidate Mulholland Drive *as a feature film come to you on that one occasion, or did they continue to occur to you as you went on with the project?*

Well, a lot did happen at that point, and then there were fine tunings later and then during the shooting there were further fine tunings. But I don't think any new things came along during the second shoot. I think those ideas did it.

How did you then go about convincing the main actors that the pilot could work as a feature?
We all stayed in touch. Laura, who plays Camilla Rhodes and Rita, said she always knew that everything would be OK – that it would be finished and it would be good. I think everybody did, way inside, but on some occasions I'd call them up and they'd say, 'This thing is *so* dead! The picture is *dead*. It's GONE.' Then later, I brought Naomi and Laura in again and told them about these new ideas that had come in and let them read a script of the new things. Obviously there were now some things in there that needed to be discussed! But it was so great because it was basically just them nodding their heads and understanding it a hundred per cent.

I think a thing existed – completed – somewhere, and we just had to discover it bit by bit. That's the way it felt. Actors are just like regular people; they know enough, have their own take on a thing, and then we have rehearsals and discussions – not about meanings necessarily – just to get the thing to *feel* correct. They might have a completely different idea in their head from me, or it could be very close. But it doesn't matter as long as it *feels* correct. That could be a difficult negotiation, but actors are pretty much abstract thinkers.

In its transition from TV pilot to feature film, did Mulholland Drive *become more complicated?*
No, it got much simpler. It became obvious what it was. It was like the day I was in the food room at the stable in AFI when we were shooting *Eraserhead*. We'd been shooting for almost a year by then and I was drawing the Lady in the Radiator. I tried to picture the radiator in Henry's room – which was 20 feet away – and I couldn't. So I went running into Henry's room and I looked at the radiator and I almost started weeping for joy. It was *perfect*. It was unique because it had a place built in it – for her. But she didn't exist when that radiator had been hand-picked. So the Lady in the Radiator married with what had gone before. I knew it already, of course. It was the same kind of thing with *Mulholland Drive*.

But there were many more elements to mesh, and narrative threads to tie up on Mulholland Drive.
Sure, but when you're working on something, you have strings that go out here and there and they end. But one of those strings is going to continue while others atrophy and fall away. You sometimes go in different directions to find your main path. And maybe one of those strings that were started comes back by surprise at the very end in a different form and you

'We were going into all parts of the movie and injecting new life into it.' Mary Sweeney with David Lynch on the set of *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

say, '*That's* how that thing fits in.' All the threads in *Mulholland Drive* are tied up.

The movie is full of obvious clues, but there are many other things that are important visual and audio indicators that are not obvious. So at times it does seem as if you're delighting in teasing or mystifying the viewer.
No, you *never* do that to an audience. An idea comes and you make it the way the idea says it wants to be, and you just stay true to that. Clues are beautiful because I believe we're all detectives. We mull things over and we figure things out. We're always working this way. People's minds hold things and form conclusions with indications. It's like music. Music starts. A theme comes in, it goes away and when it comes back it's so much greater because of what's gone before.

But audiences have struggled with trying to work the movie out and, at a certain point, they just want you to tell them what it all means – to you.
Yeah, and I always say the same thing: I think they really know for themselves what it's about. I think that intuition – the detective in us – puts things together in a way that makes sense for us. They say intuition gives you an inner knowing, but the weird thing about inner knowing is that it's

really hard to communicate that to someone else. As soon as you try, you realize that you don't have the words, or the ability to say that inner knowing to your friend. But you still *know it*! It's *really* frustrating. I think you can't communicate it because the knowing is too beautifully abstract. And yet poets can catch an abstraction in words and give you a feeling that you can't get any other way.

I think people know what *Mulholland Drive* is to them but they don't trust it. They want to have someone else tell them. I love people analysing it but they don't need me to help them out. That's the beautiful thing, to figure things out as a detective. Telling them robs them of the joy of thinking it through and *feeling* it through and coming to a conclusion.

And it doesn't matter if that conclusion isn't the same as yours?
Right, because even if you get the whole thing, there would still be some abstract elements in it that you'd have to kind of feel-think. You'd have to say, 'I kind of understand that, but I don't know *exactly* what it is.' Sort of. The frames are always the same on the film – it's always the same length and the same soundtrack is always running along it. But the experience in the room changes depending on the audience. That's another reason why people shouldn't be told too much, because 'knowing' putrefies that experience.

Camilla Rhodes (Laura Elena Harring) kisses Camilla Rhodes (Melissa George). Confused? Don't worry, it's just a party in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

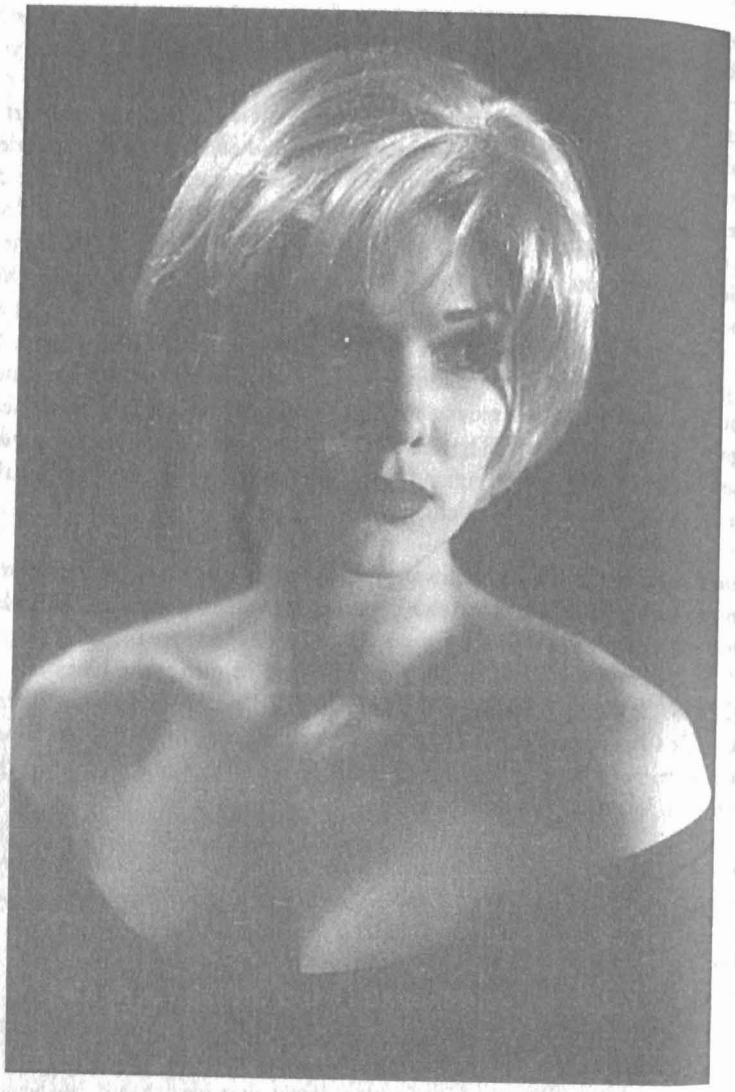
This also may be the first movie ever in which even the ad campaign – in the UK at least – included clues to unlock the mystery of the film. Was it your idea to do that?
No. Here's the way that happened. The French distributor was part of Canal + and I'd talk to them more than I would talk to the American distributor, even though the movie came out in America first. So one day Pierre Edelman calls me and says, 'David, we're thinking about some sort of thing where we do ten clues to the meaning of *Mulholland Drive*', and I said, 'Pierre!' you know [laughs], 'but just for the heck of it, let me think about it.'

They had to be genuine clues, but they also had to be pretty obscure. So, if you had a certain take on the movie, the clues would be obvious and if you had another take on it, they'd make you think and maybe you'd see it again in a different way. They said it kind of worked, so I guess that's why they made their way to England. I'm against that kind of thing, but they were pretty abstract kind of clues.

You once described Lost Highway *– partly in jest – as a twenty-first-century* noir *horror film. Do you think that might also describe* Mulholland Drive*?*
It's not like you set out to do a certain type of thing; the ideas tell you what it's going to be, and by the time you realize what that is, it's almost done. It's strange how films unfold as they go. There may be *noir* elements in *Mulholland Drive*, and a couple of genres swimming around in there together. For me, it's a love story.

In Lost Highway *two actors each played different manifestations of the same main character – Fred Madison. In this movie you've reversed that by having all the lead actors – and some of the supporting cast – each play two different characters. Is the one-actor-one-role approach becoming a thing of the past for you?*
You can't think, 'I'm only going to do films with one character playing at least two characters', but sometimes the ideas that spring on you are that way. There's something so fascinating about that idea, but it happened in *Mulholland Drive* out of left-field in a way. *Lost Highway* was more *about* that because it was a film about the mind tricking itself in order to save itself from having to deal with the un-dealable.

The mind is such a friend to us when it shuts off certain things. But there's a price to pay for shutting it off. It can fester. How big the mind is we do not know. It's a beautiful place, but it can also be pitch dark. Sometimes ideas



This is the girl. Laura Elena Harring (as Rita/Camilla Rhodes) in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

come into my mind that make me crazy. I don't know where they come from and I don't know what purpose they serve.

That's one thing about meditation – eventually it cleans those stresses

and terrible things. You can deal with those things in psychiatry, but in dealing with them in that way, they come up *again*. So it's a double whack! In Transcendental Meditation the twisted stress becomes like water in the sun on a hot pavement. It just evaporates. You don't re-live the stress, it just goes away. So you get a stress-free nervous system filled with the Being and there are no dark corners. There's just light, and you see the great big beautiful picture.

But as a writer and director you don't seem at all interested in making a film about that state of grace. Your characters are mostly still in the land of darkness and confusion.

It's strangely true what you say. It would be interesting if something like pure bliss consciousness came out in a certain way, but it would have to come out as an organic part of darkness and confusion. We enjoy seeing nice people tempted into some strange situations that test them. Each film is sort of like an experiment. We need to gain knowledge and experience through combined opposites. Free will and experience often gets us into trouble, but hopefully we learn from that trouble.

When you put women in trouble, you seem to love watching them cry. There was certainly a lot of that in Twin Peaks *and there is even more in* Mulholland Drive. *What it is about women crying that fascinates you?*

I don't know! What IS it? It's a lot of things swimming together, I guess. I've done that kind of scene a few times. Maybe I'll do it a bunch more. I don't want to say exactly what it is because it won't be enough.

In Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me, *Laura Palmer sobs bitterly while she watches Julee Cruise singing 'Questions in a World of Blue' at The Roadhouse. In* Mulholland Drive *both Diane and Rita sob uncontrollably while watching Rebekah Del Rio mime to her own performance of Roy Orbison's 'Crying' at Club Silencio. How did the latter come about?*

That was an accident. My friend and former music agent at CA, Brian Loucks, calls from time to time and says, 'I want you to meet so-and-so, can we come over for a coffee?' One day he calls me and says, 'I want you to meet Rebekah Del Rio.' So Rebekah comes over with Brian at ten o'clock in the morning and because I'd said to John Neff 'I think she's gonna sing', he's set up the microphone – a very *beautiful* microphone – in one of the booths in my recording studio. Rebekah just wanted to come over for a coffee and sing in front of us. She didn't want to record anything, but she came in and four minutes later – I think *before* she'd had her coffee – she's

in the booth. And the one take that she sang, four minutes off the street, is the vocal that's in the film. THE ACTUAL RECORDING!

The weird thing is that she chose to sing that particular Roy Orbison song. I was about to start shooting *Blue Velvet* and 'Crying' came on the radio. I said 'Jeez! I've got to get that song to see if it would work in the film.' In the end it wasn't quite right but I started listening to other cuts and 'In Dreams' came up. It was destined to change things in the most beautiful ways after that. Rebekah knows Barbara Orbison, Roy's second wife, and she's the one who translated 'Crying' into Spanish, but it's just so strange that that was the song that was almost in *Blue Velvet*.

Rebekah's got one of the most beautiful voices in the world, so I said, 'Damn, this is *unbelievable*!' And I start thinking about it. We listened to it after she left and I said, 'She's gonna be in the film.' I'd had this other idea that I'd written down one night, so that jumped in and provided the slot for Rebekah.

The lip sync that she did when we actually shot that scene much later was like the best I've ever seen. She's the original singer, of course, but even so there are singers who can't do that – the lips and the tongue and the breaths don't work. But this was *perfect* in every way.

Club Silencio's star turn. Rebekah Del Rio as herself (a unique state of affairs) in *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

There seems to be a lot of miming in Mulholland Drive, *to music – at the auditions for Adam Kesher's movie – but also people 'miming' entire lives. Is the character of Betty in some respects Diane's 'mime'?*

[LONG pause.]

. . . Someone who only becomes 'real' when she plays someone else for that brilliant audition at Paramount Pictures . . .

[Pause continues.]

. . . Doing exactly the same scene we've already watched her rehearse rather badly with Rita? What was that all about?

It's like doing something twice – the same piece of material two different ways. It's always interesting. In *Blue Velvet* the song 'In Dreams' is played twice, and it's got a completely different feeling each time, and a different meaning. Or maybe it's the same meaning but you see it a different way. All the characters are dealing somewhat with a question of identity. Like everyone.

Do you ever really rely on anyone else to put you right on anything if you're not ultimately convinced yourself?

You've got to rely on yourself. There's a certain point when you have that screening for other people, and people love to give you their opinions. So you think about those things. If twenty people say, 'I didn't understand that thing', and it's critical that they *do* understand it, you might say 'OK'. You can learn from those things, and also from the feeling in the room when you see it with a group. Those things usually happen before the final mix – in a temp mix situation – and a lot of changes come out of that. You think things are going good until you sit with other people. They tell you everything just by being in the room with you. They don't have to open their mouths.

Your music editor and sound mixer John Neff told me that the final mix for Mulholland Drive *took a long time.*

All mixes are long, to get the film to feel correct in terms of the sound and the music. The good thing about mixing in my own theatre downstairs is that the clock isn't ticking in terms of money. It is to a certain degree, because you hire extra people, but now the equipment has come up to a certain place where you spend less time preparing for a mix and more time experimenting as you move forward. So the actual mix takes longer, but the prep time is shorter, and that's the way I like to work. You act and react. You're able to dump this and try that, or rock away and do another whole thing completely and then come back and go at the mix

from a different angle. So you work until it feels correct and only then do you stop.

How do you know when it's correct? You could go on forever refining and refining . . .

At a certain point it just feels correct and you move on. You could go on making ten different correctnesses, and they'd each end up feeling right in some way. But you have certain firewood, raw materials, equipment, personnel, and a mood. It's a certain time of year. All of these things are what you've got to work with, and you just keep working until they all marry and the film feels correct.

Also, it's not done until you see it all together. If you see the film reel by reel you're *kidding* yourself! So when you finish a mix, you see it all at once. Make sure you don't have any guns in the room then, because it's a *nightmare*.

And then – for me – it's chopping out music. Music goes out, out, out, out, OUT! And then I go too far, and it's bare and that's good because then it's like, 'Bring that back, let's see it again.' And maybe some new ideas come in because the sound is now too sparse here or there, and you keep on going like that until the whole thing plays correctly, and then you're done. I love getting movies to where they're really right for me. That part is just *beautiful*. It would be fantastic to be able to make them and never put them out.

But when it was eventually released into the world, Mulholland Drive *did get a lot of brilliant reviews, as well as nominations and prizes.*

Critically it worked out *unbelievably* well. Financially, it didn't work out because it didn't cross over to the bigger population. Why? It BEATS ME!

Filmography

1967

Six Men Getting Sick

Six abstracted figures appear in outline. Their internal organs become visible, and their stomachs fill with a brightly coloured substance, which travels up to their heads, causing them to vomit.

Animated and photographed (in colour) by David Lynch
1 minute film loop (16mm) to be projected on a sculptured screen

1968

The Alphabet

A girl lies on a pristine white bed surrounded by darkness, listening to the sound of children chanting their ABCs. Individual letters flourish in the sunlight as a male voice sings about learning the alphabet. A life form is born, but a plant sprinkles letters over it and it collapses in a bloody mess, scattering red dots over the girl and her bed. The letters of the alphabet appear one by one in the darkness. The girl reaches for them, as a female voice tells us that she has learnt her ABC. The girl is then tethered in a network of plant-like tentacles before writhing in pain. As she thrashes around in her bed she violently vomits blood over the virgin white sheets.

Written, directed, animated, photographed (in colour) and edited by David Lynch.
Co-producer: H. Barton Wasserman
Sound: David Lynch
Opening song: David Lynch
Singers: Bob Chadwick and Peggy Lynch
Cast: Peggy Lynch
4 minutes, 16mm

1970

The Grandmother

At turns beaten and neglected by his parents, a lonely boy explores the vast darkness of a torment-filled family home. He discovers a mysterious bag of seeds in the attic and plants one on a bed piled high with earth. The seed produces a large plant, the roots of which take over the bed. Continually in trouble with his parents for wetting the bed, the boy visits his secret plant, which finally bursts open

producing a kindly old woman, who befriends the boy. However, she soon falls ill. The boy's parents laugh at his apparent distress. The old woman now dead, the boy returns to his room and he too transforms into a plant.

Producer: David Lynch, with financial assistance from the American Film Institute.
Directed, written, photographed (in colour), animated and edited by David Lynch
Assistants: Margaret Lynch, C. K. Williams
Still photography: Doug Randall
Sound: Alan R. Splet
Sound Effects: David Lynch, Margaret Lynch, Robert Chadwick, Alan Splet
Music/music effects: Tractor
Cast: Richard White (*Boy*), Dorothy McGinnis (*Grandmother*), Virginia Maitland (*Mother*), Robert Chadwick (*Father*)
34 minutes, 16mm

1974

The Amputee

A woman sits, reading and composing a letter in her head. The correspondence apparently concerns a tangled emotional web of various relationships and misunderstandings. A doctor enters. He sits down in front of her, quietly treating and dressing the stump ends of her legs, both severed at the knee. The woman continues to work on her letter, without acknowledging either the doctor or the treatment in progress.

Produced, written and directed by David Lynch
Photography (black and white): Herb Cardwell
Cast: Catherine Coulson (*Woman*), David Lynch (*Doctor*)
5 minutes, videotape

1976

Eraserhead

In the depths of The Planet, a Man pulls levers. Images implying conception and birth occur. We surface. On arriving home at his strange, squalid apartment in the midst of a desolate industrial landscape, Henry Spencer is told by a neighbour that his girlfriend Mary has invited him for dinner at her parents' home. Once there, he discovers that he has fathered a premature 'baby', which is still at the hospital. Mary moves in with Henry but soon returns to her parents, unable to sleep through the 'baby's' constant crying. Henry fantasizes about a lady who appears on a stage inside his radiator. She sings about Heaven, while stamping on strange worm-like creatures. The 'baby' falls ill and, having been seduced by his neighbour, Henry fantasizes about being on the radiator stage. His head is pushed off by the 'baby' growing inside him and is taken to a workshop to be processed into pencil-top erasers. Henry finally kills the baby, causing a cosmic catastrophe. The Planet explodes, despite the efforts of The Man at its centre, pulling levers in vain.

A blinding white flash. Henry meets the Lady in the Radiator in what might be the afterlife. They embrace tenderly.

Producer: David Lynch, in association with the American Film Institute Centre for Advanced Film Studies
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch
Cinematography (black and white): Herbert Cardwell, Frederick Elmes
Sound: Alan R. Splet
Editor: David Lynch
Music: Fats Waller, Peter Ivers
Production Design: David Lynch
Special Effects: David Lynch
Cast: Jack Nance (*Henry Spencer*), Charlotte Stewart (*Mary X*), Allen Joseph (*Bill X*), Jeanne Bates (*Mary's Mother*), Judith Anna Roberts (*Beautiful Girl across the Hall*), Laurel Near (*Lady in the Radiator*), Jack Fisk (*Man in the Planet*), Jean Lange (*Grandmother*), Thomas Coulson (*The Boy*), John Monez (*Bum*) and others
89 minutes, 35mm

1979

Lynch makes a cameo appearance as a painter (providing his own paintings) in John Byrum's *Heart Beat*

1980

The Elephant Man

1884. Intrigued by a freakshow advertised as the 'Elephant Man', ambitious surgeon Frederick Treves pays the unpleasant owner, Bytes, for a private viewing. Appalled and excited by what he sees, he convinces Bytes to agree to a secret examination at the London Hospital. On realizing that his charge – John Merrick – has been badly beaten, Treves admits him as a patient, despite Bytes's threats. Discovering that Merrick is not the imbecile he thought, Treves begins to educate him in order to make a good impression on senior surgeon Carr Gomm and thereby ensure his stay at the hospital. Merrick becomes a figure of fascination in high society, sparked by the personal interest of actress Madge Kendal. A permanent home at the hospital is secured by royal intervention, but Merrick is tormented by the nightly visits of low-life acquaintances of the night porter, who pay for a look at the monstrous celebrity. Merrick disappears, returning to Bytes and the circus, but is liberated by the other 'freaks' when he is badly treated. Now fatally ill, Merrick returns to Treves and sees Madge Kendal in pantomime before laying his heavy head down to die.

Production Company: Brooksfilms
Executive Producer: Stuart Cornfeld
Producer: Jonathan Sanger

Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: Christopher de Vore, Eric Bergren, David Lynch
Cinematography (black and white): Freddie Francis
Sound Design: Alan R. Splet
Music: John Morris
Production Design: Stuart Craig
Elephant Man make-up: Chris Tucker
Cast: Anthony Hopkins (*Frederick Treves*), John Hurt (*John Merrick*), Anne Bancroft (*Mrs Madge Kendal*), Sir John Gielgud (*Carr Gomm*), Wendy Hiller (*Mothershead*), Freddie Jones (*Bytes*), Michael Elphick (*Night Porter*), Hannah Gordon (*Mrs Treves*), Helen Ryan (*Princess Alex*), John Standing (*Fox*) and others
124 minutes

1984

Dune

10,991. The desert planet Arrakis (Dune) is the universe's only known source of the spice *mélange*, which prolongs life, expands consciousness and allows travel through space and time. Emperor Shaddam IV administrates both the spice trade and the various vested interests of the individual planets in this matter, under the direction of the Supreme Being. The Emperor assigns the House of Atreides, led by Duke Leto, to administrate Dune, thereby ousting its previous governors, the Harkonnens, led by Baron Vladimir. This is at once a plot between the Emperor and the Harkonnens to wipe out the Atreides and a plan to depose the Emperor himself by Baron Vladimir's nephew, Fedy Rautha. No sooner have Leto, his son Paul and his concubine Jessica landed on Dune than they are betrayed. Leto is killed, but Paul and Jessica escape and are rescued by the Fremen, mysterious desert nomads. Doses of the spice have already heightened Paul's skills and revealed to him an interplanetary conspiracy spanning ninety generations to produce a super being. Now accepted by the Fremen as their long-awaited messiah, destined to mount a holy war that will restore the fertility of Dune, Paul leads them into battle on their giant sandworms. Harkonnen and Imperial forces vanquished, Paul finds himself master of Dune, the spice and the universe – the super being himself.

Production Company: Dino De Laurentiis/Universal
Producer: Rafaella De Laurentiis
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch
Cinematography (colour): Freddie Francis
Sound Design: Alan R. Splet
Editor: Antony Gibbs
Music: Mary Paich, Toto, Brian Eno, Daniel Lanois, Roger Eno
Production Design: Anthony Masters

Mechanical Creatures: Carlo Rambaldi
Cast: Francesca Annis (*Lady Jessica*), Kyle MacLachlan (*Paul Atreides*), Dean Stockwell (*Dr Wellington Yueh*), Max Von Sydow (*Dr Keynes*), Jurgen Prochnow (*Duke Leto Atreides*), Brad Dourif (*Peter De Vries*), Jose Ferrer (*Padisha Emperor Shaddam IV*), Freddie Jones (*Thufir Hawat*), Silvana Mangano (*Reverend Mother Ramallo*), Kenneth McMillan (*Baron Vladimir Harkonnen*) and others
137 minutes, 70mm

1986

Blue Velvet

Lumberton, USA. Returning from visiting his father in hospital, Jeffrey Beaumont discovers a severed human ear, which he delivers to the secretive Detective Williams. Williams's eavesdropping daughter, Sandy, tells Jeffrey that it may be connected to nightclub singer Dorothy Vallens. With Sandy's help, Jeffrey breaks into Vallens's apartment and witnesses her sexual humiliation and violation by Frank Booth. Jeffrey suspects that Frank holds her child and her husband – whose ear he has cut off – hostage. He becomes involved with the masochistic Vallens, and is badly beaten up by Frank after being taken to Ben's, where Vallens's child is held. Jeffrey confesses his discoveries to Detective Williams, later realizing that the policeman's partner is also involved with Frank in a drugs-related murder. Sandy and Jeffrey are now in love, but Vallens turns up in the street outside Jeffrey's house, naked and beaten, and spills the beans about their affair. Jeffrey returns to Vallens's apartment and finds the bodies of her husband and Detective Williams's partner. Frank returns to kill him but is shot dead by his prey. Jeffrey awakens in his garden. His father is talking to Detective Williams. Sandy calls him to lunch. Dorothy embraces her son.

Production Company: De Laurentiis Entertainment Group
Executive Producer: Richard Roth
Producer: Fred Caruso
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch
Cinematography (colour): Frederick Elmes
Sound Design: Alan R. Splet
Editor: Duwayne Dunham
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Cast: Kyle MacLachlan (*Jeffrey Beaumont*), Isabella Rossellini (*Dorothy Vallens*), Dennis Hopper (*Frank Booth*), Laura Dern (*Sandy Williams*), Hope Lange (*Mrs Williams*), Dean Stockwell (*Ben*), George Dickerson (*Detective Williams*), Brad Dourif (*Raymond*), Jack Nance (*Paul*), Priscilla Pointer (*Mrs Beaumont*), and others
120 minutes, 35mm

1988

The Cowboy and the Frenchman

The Wild West. A gathering of ranchers, headed by Slim, see a strange sight approaching. They lassoo a creature in a beret, who speaks a bizarre language. It is a Frenchman called Pierre. They wonder if he is a spy, but as he doesn't speak English and they don't speak French, communication proves difficult – added to which Slim is very hard of hearing. The Frenchman is carrying a basket of treasure: a bottle of wine, a baguette, Gauloise cigarettes, mussels, a ripe Camembert, french fries and some miniature Eiffel Towers. Some girls arrive with beers and a party ensues – the cowboys join the French girls and the cowgirls party with Pierre. They sing 'Home on the Range', and exclaim '*Vive la France!*'

Production Company: Erato Films, Socpress, Figaro
Executive Producers: Paul Cameron, Pierre Olivier
Producer: Daniel Toscan du Plantier
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch
Cinematography (colour): Frederick Elmes
Sound: John Huck
Editor: Scott Chestnut
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Cast: Harry Dean Stanton (*Slim*), Frederick Golchan (*Pierre*), Jack Nance, Michael Horse, Rick Guillory, Tracey Walters, Marie Lauren, Patrick Hauser, Eddi Dixon, Jackie Old Coyote and others
22 minutes, video

Lynch stars opposite Isabella Rossellini in Tina Rathbone's *Zelly and Me*

1989

Twin Peaks (pilot of the television series, with scenes from other episodes, released as a feature)

Twin Peaks, Washington. The dead body of beautiful homecoming queen Laura Palmer is found washed up on the shore of the logging town. Special Agent Dale Cooper is sent to investigate, befriending the local lawman Sheriff Harry S. Truman. Laura's father Leland is involved with shady businessman Benjamin Horn in attempting to sell land in Twin Peaks to a delegation of Swedish bankers for the development of a health spa. Cooper discovers the letter 'R' under one of Laura's fingernails, linking it to the murder of a young girl Teresa Banks a year earlier. Cooper and Truman soon discover that Laura was leading a double life: taking cocaine and possibly involved in prostitution, with her friend Ronette Pulaski, who is also missing. Pulaski turns up, deeply traumatized, and is admitted to hospital. Laura's mother Sarah suddenly has a vision of someone she saw in her daughter's bedroom the morning of her disppearance. A mysterious one-armed man contacts Cooper. They rendezvous in the hospital where the man introduces

Laura's killer, the mysterious and demonic Bob, who is shot. Twenty-five years later, Cooper is in a strange Red Room with the dead Laura Palmer. She whispers in his ear while a little man dances to music.

Production Company: Lynch/Frost Productions, Propaganda Films, Spelling Entertainment
Executive Producers: Mark Frost and David Lynch
Producer: David J. Latt
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch and Mark Frost
Cinematography (in colour): Ron Garcia
Sound: John Wentworth
Editor: Duwayne Dunham
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Cast: Kyle MacLachlan (*Special Agent Dale Cooper*), Michael Ontkean (*Sheriff Harry S. Truman*), Sheryl Lee (*Laura Palmer*), Ray Wise (*Leland Palmer*), Grace Zabriskie (*Sarah Palmer*), Dana Ashbrook (*Bobby Briggs*), Phoebe Augustine (*Ronette Pulaski*), Catherine Coulson (*Log Lady*), Al Strobel (*One-armed Man*), Frank Silva (*Bob*) and others
112 mins, 35mm

1990

Wild at Heart

Cape Fear. Liberated from a two-year prison sentence for manslaughter, Sailor takes off with his sweetheart Lula. Her mother, Marietta, hell-bent on keeping them apart, persuades her ex-lover, private detective Johnnie Farragut, to find them. En route to New Orleans, Lula tells Sailor how her father died by setting himself on fire (Sailor had been driver to Marietta's associate, drug-dealer Marcello Santos). Marietta then solicits Santos's help in the search for the runaways. He agrees on condition that he kills Farragut and contacts drug baron Mr Reindeer, who puts out contracts on Sailor and Lula. A remorseful Marietta joins Farragut in New Orleans, but he is killed by Reindeer's crippled hireling, Juana. On the way to Big Tuna, Sailor reveals to Lula that he had witnessed Santos's murder of her father. Discovering that Lula is pregnant, Reindeer's henchman Bobby Peru talks Sailor into taking part in a hold-up (a set-up for his murder). However, Peru is killed, and Sailor is back in prison. On his release, Lula takes her son Pace to meet his father. Initially beset by self-doubt, Sailor is inspired by a fantasy from *The Wizard of Oz* to return to her.

Production Company: Propaganda Films for Polygram
Executive Producer: Michael Kuhn
Producers: Monty Montgomery, Steve Golin, Sigurjon Sighvatsson
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch

Cinematography (colour): Frederick Elmes
Sound: John Huck
Editor: Duwayne Dunham
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Cast: Nicolas Cage (*Sailor Ripley*), Laura Dern (*Lula Pace Fortune*), Diane Ladd (*Marietta Pace*), Willem Dafoe (*Bobby Peru*), Isabella Rossellini (*Perdida Durango*), Harry Dean Stanton (*Johnnie Farragut*), Crispin Glover (*Dell*), Grace Zabriskie (*Juana*), J. E. Freeman (*Marcello Santos*), W. Morgan Shepherd (*Mr Reindeer*) and others.
124 minutes, 35mm

1992

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

Washington State. FBI Agents Chester Desmond and Sam Stanley investigate the murder of prostitute Teresa Banks. Desmond unearths significant clues before mysteriously disappearing. Psychic agent Dale Cooper predicts that the killer will strike again. Later, in Twin Peaks, homecoming queen Laura Palmer is dating both Bobby Briggs, supplier of her escalating cocaine habit, and biker James Hurley. She tells best friend Donna Hayward that she is being violated by Bob, a demonic figure. When Donna follows Laura to a seedy club run by Jacques Renault, she is drugged and molested. Laura begins to realize that Bob and her father Leland are the same being. After witnessing Bobby's hotheaded shooting of a corrupt deputy, Laura is visited by Annie, a bloody vision from the future, who tells her that Dale is trapped in the Lodge. When James refuses to accept Laura's confession of her secret life, she joins hooker Ronette Pulaski, Jacques and local thug Leo Johnson in an orgy. Left tied up, the girls are found by Leland/Bob. Dragging them to a disused railroad car, he abuses and kills Laura. She is posthumously transported to the Lodge where she has a vision of an angel.

Production Company: Twin Peaks Productions
Executive Producers: Mark Frost/David Lynch
Producer: Greg Fienberg
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch/Robert Engels
Cinematography (colour): Ron Garcia
Sound Design: David Lynch
Editor: Mary Sweeney
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Cast: Sheryl Lee (*Laura Palmer*), Ray Wise (*Leland Palmer*), Chris Isaak (*Special Agent Chester Desmond*), Kiefer Sutherland (*Sam Stanley*), Grace Zabriskie (*Sarah Palmer*), Kyle MacLachlan (*Special Agent Dale Cooper*), Dana Ashbrook (*Bobby Briggs*), Phoebe Augustine (*Ronette Pulaski*), Frank Silva (*Bob*), Moira Kelly

(*Donna Hayward*), James Marshall (*James Hurley*), and others.
134 minutes, 35mm

1994

Lynch makes a cameo appearance as a mortuary attendant in Michael Almereyda's *Nadja*.

1995

Lumière and Company

Three policemen approach the body of a young boy lying in a field. A woman sits at home: she looks anxious. A garden tableau of three beautiful women stir. A group of monstrous beings in overalls wanders through a factory while a naked woman, completely submerged in a tank of water, struggles. The police arrive at a home. A man stands and the woman answers the door . . .

Producer: Neal Edelstein
Director: David Lynch
Cinematography (black and white): Peter Deming
Wardrobe: Patricia Norris
Cast: Jeff Alperi, Mark Wood, Stan Lothridge (*Cops*), Russ Pearlman (*Dead Son*), Pam Pierrocish (*Mother*), Clyde Small (*Father*), Joan Rurdlestein, Michele Carlyle, Kathleen Raymond (*Women*), Dawn Salcedo (*Woman in Tank*) and others
55 seconds, 35mm

(*Lumière and Company* is a film comprising 40 short films, each lasting 55 seconds and each made by a different director, as part of the celebration of 100 years of cinema.)

1997

Lost Highway

Los Angeles. Jazz saxophone player Fred Madison suspects that his wife, Renée, is being unfaithful. Mysterious video tapes of their house, shot from both outside and then inside (while they sleep), begin to arrive anonymously, and Fred meets a Mystery Man, who plays tricks on him. Later, on one of the video tapes, we glimpse what looks like a butchered Renée. Arrested for murder, Fred experiences a series of blinding headaches. The next day, garage mechanic Pete Dayton awakes in Fred's cell, unable to explain how he came to be there. Released, Pete suspects that things aren't quite right. His girlfriend, Sheila, speaks enigmatically about how he seemed to change on a certain night. Pete then meets Alice (who looks similar to Renée), girlfriend of the gangster Mr Eddy. They begin a passionate affair. Alice convinces Pete to rob Andy, a porn video maker, so they can get away. Andy is accidentally killed and they flee to the desert and the Lost Highway Hotel. With the police now on Pete's trail, Alice suddenly rejects him. He is replaced by

Fred. Armed with a video camera, The Mystery Man reappears, as does Mr Eddy – who is killed by Fred. Sirens blazing, police cars chase the screaming Fred along a dark desert highway.

Production Company: CIBY-2000, Asymmetrical Productions
Producers: Deepak Nayar, Tom Sternberg, Mary Sweeney
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch and Barry Gifford
Cinematography (colour): Peter Deming
Sound: Sasumu Tokunow
Editor: Mary Sweeney
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Patricia Norris
Cast: Bill Pullman (*Fred Madison*), Patricia Arquette (*Renée Madison/Alice Wakefield*), Balthazar Getty (*Pete Dayton*), Robert Blake (*Mystery Man*), Robert Loggia (*Mr Eddy/Dick Laurant*), Michael Manssee (*Andy*), Natasha Gregson Wagnera (*Sheila*), Gary Busey (*Bill Dayton*), Richard Pryor (*Arnie*), Lucy Butler (*Candice Dayton*) and others
135 minutes, 35mm

1999

The Straight Story

Laurens, Iowa. Seventy-three-year-old widower Alvin Straight suffers a bad fall at home. His doctor says that he must take greater care of himself – a warning he both ignores and keeps from his adult daughter Rose, with whom he lives. Rose receives a phonecall telling her that her father's older, estranged brother Lyle has had a stroke. Alvin decides he must visit Lyle, who lives in Mount Zion, Wisconsin, to heal old family differences. Too blind to drive himself, and too stubborn to be driven, Alvin sets off on the 300-mile trip on a motorized lawnmower. As he chugs along at 4 miles per hour Alvin meets and befriends a number of people, including a pregnant runaway teenager; a woman who drives into – and kills – a deer, on a twice-weekly basis; and a World War Two veteran, with whom he shares traumatic experiences of battle. Six weeks after setting off, Alvin finally arrives at Lyle's old wooden shack. The two brothers sit together on the porch in virtual silence, seemingly content to be in each other's company again after so long.

Production Company: Alain Sarde presents with Le Studio Canal +, Film Four, Picture Factory
Executive Producers: Pierre Edelman, Michael Polaire
Producers: Mary Sweeney, Neal Edelstein
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: John Roach, Mary Sweeney
Cinematography (colour): Freddie Francis

Sound: Susumu Tokunow
Editor: Mary Sweeney
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Jack Fisk
Cast: Richard Farnsworth (*Alvin Straight*), Sissy Spacek (*Rose Straight*), Harry Dean Stanton (*Lyle Straight*), Everett McGill (*Tom the John Deere dealer*), John Farley (*Thorvald Olsen*), Kevin Farley (*Harald Olsen*), Jane Galloway Heitz (*Dorothy*), Joseph A. Carpenter (*Bud*), Donald Weigert (*Sig*), Tracey Maloney (*nurse*) and others
111 minutes, 35mm

2001

Mulholland Drive

Los Angeles. A botched 'hit' on a woman being driven in a limousine along Mulholland Drive ends in a car crash. The woman staggers away, taking refuge in the apartment of Ruth – a movie star temporarily leaving town. Ruth's would-be actress niece, Betty Elms, takes over the apartment and discovers the woman who – suffering from amnesia – calls herself Rita. Her handbag contains a large amount of money and a strange blue key. Betty enthusiastically takes Rita under her wing and together they decide to discover Rita's real identity. Film director Adam Kesher resists the efforts of mob-like financial backers to cast actress Camilla Rhodes in his new movie. A menacing cowboy later convinces him to play ball. Rita remembers the name Diane Selwyn. On tracking her down, Betty and Rita discover her corpse. They become lovers and Rita is compelled to go to Club Silencio, where they find a blue box that matches the key. When the box is opened, Betty discovers that she is Diane Selwyn and that Rita has become the successful movie star Camilla Rhodes, who has left her for director Adam Kesher. Insanely jealous, Diane hires a hitman to kill Camilla. He promises to leave an ordinary blue key to signify that the hit has been carried out but Diane, menaced by an old couple who befriended Betty on the plane to Los Angeles, commits suicide.

Production Company: Les Films Alain Sarde, Asymmetrical Productions
Executive Producer: Pierre Edelmen
Producers: Mary Sweeney, Alain Sarde, Neal Edelstein, Michael Polaire, Tony Krantz
Director: David Lynch
Screenplay: David Lynch
Cinematography (colour): Peter Deming
Sound: Susumu Tokunow, Edward Novick
Editor: Mary Sweeney
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Production Design: Jack Fisk
Cast: Naomi Watts (*Betty Elms/Diane Selwyn*), Laura Elena Harring (*Rita/Camilla Rhodes*), Justin Theroux (*Adam Kesher*), Ann Miller (*Coco Lenoix*), Dan Hedaya (*Vincenzo Castigliane*), Angelo Badalamenti (*Luigi Castigliane*), Robert Forster

(*Detective Harry McKnight*), Brent Briscoe (*Detective Domgaard*), Michael J. Anderson (*Mr Roque*), Lafayette Montgomery (*Cowboy*) and others
146 minutes, 35mm

Television Credits

1989

Twin Peaks

Twenty-nine episodes, which follow on from the series pilot.

As the investigation into who killed Laura Palmer continues, it's clear that the town of Twin Peaks has many secrets, and many of its inhabitants fall under suspicion. Special Agent Dale Cooper has a mystical vision of Laura in a Red Room with the little Man from Another Place. There is a plot to close down the town's sawmill, engineered by Benjamin Horn, whose daughter Audrey starts her own investigation at One-Eyed Jack's, a nearby whorehouse. Everyone in town is having secret affairs. Cooper begins looking for the mysterious Bob – fingered by a one-armed man known as Mike. News of coded messages from space, and strange manifestations (including a giant) do not bode well. Maddie, Laura's cousin, arrives in town for the funeral but stays to help James (Laura's secret boyfriend) and Donna (her best friend) to solve the mystery. The hair of Laura's father Leland turns white overnight. Maddie is later murdered herself by the demonic Bob, who appears to be Leland in the throes of possession. Finally, Leland is made to realize what has happened to him and confesses to the murder of his daughter. But his possessor, Bob, escapes Leland's body.

Agent Cooper is subsequently suspended from duty, and is pursued by his ex-FBI partner, the vengeful Windom Earl. Cooper learns more of the existence of the Black Lodge – the mysterious 'other place' where Bob resides. The exact location of a 'doorway' to the Lodge is discovered in the woods; Cooper loses his girlfriend, Annie, to its powers. In the end, he finds himself in its red waiting room, and meets himself. The 'good' Cooper remains trapped in the Lodge, while the 'bad' Cooper returns to Twin Peaks. Bob stares back at him from the mirror . . .

Director (episodes 1, 2, 8, 9, 14 and 29): David Lynch.
Other directors: Tina Rathbone (*eps. 2 and 17*), Tim Hunter (*eps. 4, 16 and 28*), Lesli Linka Glatter (*eps. 5, 10, 13 and 23*), Caleb Deschanel (*eps. 6, 15 and 19*), Mark Frost (*ep. 9*), Todd Holland (*eps. 11 and 20*), Graeme Gifford (*ep. 12*), Duwayne Dunham (*eps. 18 and 25*), Diane Keaton (*ep. 22*), James Foley (*ep. 24*), Uli Edel (*ep. 21*), Jonathan Sanger (*ep. 26*), Stephen Gyllenhaal (*ep. 27*).
Co-writers: Harley Peyton (*eps. 3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27 and 29*), Robert Engels (*eps. 4, 10, 11, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 27 and 29*), Jerry Stahl (*ep. 11*), Barry Pullman (*eps. 12, 18, 24 and 28*), Scott Frost (*eps. 15 and 21*), Tricia Brock (*eps. 17 and 23*)

Cast: Kyle MacLachlan (*Special Agent Dale Cooper*), Michael Ontkean (*Sheriff Harry S. Truman*), Sheryl Lee (*Laura Palmer*), Ray Wise (*Leland Palmer*), Grace Zabriskie (*Sarah Palmer*), Dana Ashbrook (*Bobby Briggs*), Phoebe Augustine (*Ronette Pulaski*), Catherine Coulson (*Log Lady*), Al Strobel (*One-armed Man*), Frank Silva (*Bob*) and others

1990–91

American Chronicles

Television documentaries produced by Lynch/Frost Productions, with David Lynch as one of the executive producers. Lynch and Frost co-directed one contribution to the series: *Champions*.

1991–92

On the Air

Set in New York in 1957 at the Zoblotnik Television Network, whose Lester Guy Show is its biggest success. Seven half-hour episodes. Produced by Lynch/Frost Productions and Twin Peaks Productions (Episode One only) for ABC Worldvision Entertainments.

David Lynch directed Episode One. He also co-wrote Episode One (with Mark Frost) and Episode Six (with Robert Engels).

1992

Hotel Room

A trilogy of short stories, all of which take place in Room 603 of the Railroad Hotel in New York City: *Tricks* (set in September 1969), *Getting Rid of Harry* (set in June 1992) and *Blackout* (set in April 1936). Produced by Asymmetrical Productions and Propaganda Films for HBO.

David Lynch directed *Tricks* (starring Harry Dean Stanton, Freddie Jones and Glenne Headly) and *Blackout* (starring Crispin Glover and Alicia Witt). Both were written by Barry Gifford.

Advertising/promotional spots

1988

Obsession. Four advertisements for the Calvin Klein fragrance.

1991

Dangerous. Promotional teaser for Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* tour
Wicked Game. Video of the Chris Isaak song featured in *Wild at Heart*
Georgia Coffee. Four advertisements made for Japanese TV, set in Twin Peaks and featuring many of the regular characters.

'We Care About New York'. Public service message that addressed the city's rat problem.

1992

'Who Is Gio'. Sixty-second film for the Georgio Armani fragrance Gio.
Opium. Advertisement for Yves Saint Laurent fragrance.

1993

Alka-Seltzer Plus. Two advertisements.
Barilla Pasta. Advertisement.
'The Wall'. Advertisement for Adidas.
'Revealed'. Public service message for the American Cancer Society on breast cancer.
'The Instinct of Life'. Jill Sander.

1994

Sun Moon Stars. Advertisement for the Karl Lagerfeld fragrance.

1995

'Longing'. Promotional video for the Japanese singer Yoshiki.

1997

'Dead Leaves', *'Aunt Droid'*, *'Clear Winter'* and *'Kiddie Ride'*. Four promotional spots for the Sci-Fi Channel.
'Mountain Man'. Advertisement for the Honda car.

1998

'Parisienne People'. Advertisement for Parisienne Cigarettes.

1999

'Opium'. Advertisement for the Yves Saint Laurent fragrance.

2000

'The Third Place'. Advertisement for the Sony Playstation 2.

2002

'Do You Speak Micra?' Advertisement for the Nissan Micra car.

2004

'Fahrenheit'. Advertisement for the Christian Dior fragrance.

Solo exhibitions

1967
Vanderlip Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1983
Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

1987
Rodger LaPelle Galleries, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, California

1989
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, New York
James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, Califiornia

1990
No. 0 Gallery, Dallas, Texas
Tavelli Gallery, Aspen, Colorado

1991
Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

1992
Sala Parpallo, Valencia

1993
James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, California

1995
Kohn/Turner Gallery, Los Angeles, California

1996
Artium, Fukuoka, Japan
Namba City Hall, Osaka, Japan
Park Tower Hall, Tokyo
Painting Pavilion, Open Air Museum, Hakone

1997
Galerie Piltzer, Paris

2003
Atlas Gallery, Lodz, Poland

Group exhibitions

1987
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts: Fellowship 1897–87, 90th Anniversary Exhibition, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1989
University of Hawaii, Honolulu

Other activities

1983–92
The Angriest Dog in the World.
Weekly comic strip in the *LA Reader*.

1989
Floating Into The Night.
Music album featuring 10 original songs from *Blue Velvet, Twin Peaks* and *Industrial Symphony No. 1*. Lyrics by Lynch, music by Angelo Badalamenti and sung by Julee Cruise. Produced by Lynch and Badalamenti. Released by Warner Bros Records Inc.

1990
Industrial Symphony No. 1.
Live performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Also filmed.
Executive Producers: David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti
Producers: Steve Golin, Monty Montgomery
Director: David Lynch
Music: Angelo Badalamenti
Sets: Franne Lee
Choreography: Martha Clark
Cinematography: John Schwartzmann
Cast: Laura Dern (*Heartbroken Woman*), Nicolas Cage (*Heartbreaker*), Julee

Cruise (*Dreamself of the Heartbroken Woman*), Michael Anderson (*Lumberjack/Twin A.*), Andre Badalamenti (*Clarinet Player/Twin B.*), Lisa Giobbi and Felix Blaska (*Solo Dancers*), John Bell (*Deer*)
49 minutes, video

1993

The Voice of Love

Music album featuring eleven original songs, including some from *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*. Lyrics by Lynch, music by Angelo Badalamenti and sung by Julee Cruise. Produced by Lynch and Badalamenti. Released by Warner Bros Records Inc.

1998

Lux Vixens (Living Night): The Music of Hildegard von Bingen

Music album comprising fifteen tracks performed by Jocelyn Montgomery (vocals, violin). Produced by David Lynch and recorded at Asymmetrical Studios. Released on Mammoth/Pgd records

2001

Blue Bob

Music album comprising twelve tracks by Lynch and John Neff. All songs and instrumentals written, performed, engineered, produced and mixed by Lynch and Neff under the name 'Blue Bob'. Recorded at Lynch's Asymmetrical Studios between April 1998 and March 2000. Lynch plays, among other things, dw drums, a Custom Fernandes 'Blackbird' guitar of his own design, and a Parker 'Fly' guitar. Released on Solitude/Mri records

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Mulvey, Laura, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, BFI Publishing, London (1996)
Various, *David Lynch: Paintings and Drawings*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (1991)
Vidler, Anthony, *The Architectural Uncanny*, The MIT Press, London (1992)

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Gray, Louise, and Romney, Jonathan, 'Songs For Swinging Loggers', *City Limits*, No. 475, Nov 8 1990, pp 18–19
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A Note on the Editor

Chris Rodley has been an independent film-maker for over twenty years. He has worked as director on the award-winning documentary series *Andy Warhol: the Complete Picture*, *This is Modern Art* and *Pornography: a Secret History of Civilisation*. He has also directed and produced documentaries on movie directors such as Wim Wenders, Donald Cammell, David Lynch, Sam Peckinpah, Dennis Hopper and David Cronenberg, as well as films about William Burroughs, Lord Byron, Dirk Bogarde, Johnny Cash, the Hollywood Studio System, American independent cinema and contemporary British art. He edited the book *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* for Faber and Faber, and is currently editing *Andy Warhol: Multiple Impressions*, also for Faber. He lives and works in London.

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